







# SERMONS

ON

VARIOUS PRACTICAL SUBJECTS.

BY THE LATE

REV. THOMAS WATSON.

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TO WHICH IS PREFIXED

A

BRIEF MEMOIR OF HIS LIFE AND WRITINGS.

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## MEMOIR.

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THE REV. THOMAS WATSON was a native of Lauder, in the county of Berwick, and was born in the year 1743. His parents, William and Ann Watson, were in humble circumstances; but wisely availing themselves of the advantages of education which North Britain offers to every class of society, they brought up a family of five sons, in a highly respectable manner.\* At a proper age, Thomas their second son, and the subject of this memoir, entered the University of Edinburgh, as a student for the Ministry, intending most probably to exercise his ministry among the Seceders, to which body his parents belonged. Here he was introduced to the notice of Dr. Robert Henry, with whose friendship he was afterwards honoured, and with whom he occasionally corresponded, till the year 1785, when the health of that learned and excellent historian began to decline.

Having finished his preparatory studies at Edinburgh, Mr. W. engaged, as is usual with young candidates for the ministry in Scotland, as a private Tutor: first in the family of Mr. Kerr, and afterwards in that of Mr. Wagt. In this latter situation he formed an acquaintance, highly interesting

\* John, the eldest son, was killed by a fall from his horse on returning from the funeral of a friend, leaving an only child, a son, now living at Lauder, and carrying on business there as a general dealer. Till lately he was one of the Bailies of his native place. James, the third son, died suddenly in his bed about two years ago, leaving several children and grand-children engaged in various laborious occupations. The fourth son, Richard, was Master of a vessel in the Coasting Trade, and died in the West Indies about thirty years ago, when rising into opulence. Andrew, the fifth son was likewise bred to the sea; and having been pressed during the American war, was killed on board one of the ships of Admiral Rodney's fleet in the engagement with Comte D'Estaing.

and useful to him, with the Rev. G. Ridpath, brother of Mrs. Wait, and the well known author of "The Border History of England and Scotland." With him also he carried on an occasional correspondence during several years.

In the year 1769 the English Presbyterian Congregation at Whitby,\* being destitute of a Minister in consequence of the sudden death of the Rev. Wm. Wood, M.D., Mr. Hendry of Darlington, probably a hearer of Dr. Wood, previously to his removal from that place to Whitby, at the suggestion of Dr. R. Henry, recommended Mr. Watson as his successor. The talents of the candidate, supported by such a recommendation, could not fail to secure a favourable result; and Mr.

\* This congregation appears to have been first formed about the year 1695, and to have assembled, probably in a private house, in Bridge Street. In 1704 the congregation removed to Staithside, and in 1718 erected a place of worship on a small plot of ground which they purchased in Flowergate. The deed of trust executed on that occasion describes the congregation as "Protestant Dissenters called Presbyterian, frequenting and assembling in the Meeting House for the worship of God;" and this must undoubtedly be considered as a recognition of the title belonging to it from its original formation. No mode of church government is prescribed, nor assent to any articles of faith on the part either of the Ministers or the Members of the church required.

Their first Minister was a Mr. Brooks, who is said to have died in 1699, and to have been succeeded by Mr. Worthington, on whose removal to Durham in 1702, Mr. Duckinfield became the Minister. He reformed and was succeeded in 1704 by Mr. Thompson, who removed to Nottingham in 1715, it is said, and was succeeded by the Rev. John Reddid. Of the three Ministers whose names we have inserted between those of Mr. Brooks and Mr. Reddid, nothing is recorded in the register-book belonging to the chapel; nor is there indeed an entry of any kind between the years 1695 and 1713. There is however a slip of paper attached to the book, containing the record of five baptisms and one marriage, in the congregation at Pickering, during the year 1706, in the hand writing of Mr. Reddid, accompanied with this remark, "The Congregation at Pickering having no Register, I shall here set down of my own Memorandum matters as they occur." And in his hand writing also are the Registers in the book for the years 1713 and 1714, as well as of those which follow. Was Mr. Reddid then Minister of Whitby and Pickering jointly in the year 1706? or is this paper a fragment of a more extensive private register kept by him while officiating at the latter place? It seems probable however from the circumstance of the entries in the register-book at Whitby so early as 1713, being written by him, that his settling at Whitby did not take place later than that year? He died in the year 1729, and the following entry in the Chapel-Register bears an honourable testimony to his liberality and his consistency as a Protestant Dissenter. "Memorandum, April 26th, 1729. Died the Rev. John Reddid, pastor of this con-

Watson being appointed Minister, was ordained at Newcastle by the Rev. J. Lowthion, at that time the highly respectable Minister to the English Presbyterian Congregation assembling in Hanover Square Chapel. This situation he continued to occupy till the day of his death, and with very few interruptions regularly to discharge its important duties, during the uncommonly long period of 56 years; surviving, as it may be readily supposed, all whom he found members of the congregation when he entered upon his charge. This connexion was as productive of mutual satisfaction, as it was extended. They who chose him as their Minister loved him as their faithful instructor, and their kind and judicious friend; and they who have been born and have grown up under his ministry, revered him while living as a father, and now cherish his memory with filial esteem and reverence.

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gregation, aged 52 years. And although he was a man of a weakly frame, yet went through various difficulties with a cheerful and resigned temper of mind; as was remarkably shown when in the year 1718 he was struck off the fund in London for his non-compliance with those who would have imposed on his judgment; rather chusing to follow the dictates of his conscience than the impositions of man. As he lived universally beloved, so he died regretted by all." The fact alluded to in this memorandum was most probably Mr. Reddid's refusal to comply with the wishes, and to follow the example of those Ministers who, at a meeting held at Salter's Hall, March 3d, 1718—19, in consequence of the disputes relating to the Trinity then existing at Exeter, agreed to sign as a declaration of their faith, the first of the thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England, and the answers to the fifth and sixth questions in the Assembly's Catechism.

The Rev. Isaac Barker succeeded Mr. Reddid, and died at the beginning of the year 1756. The register-book contains the following tribute to his memory, affixed by the same hand that had recorded the virtues of his predecessor. "Memorandum. The Rev. Isaac Barker died Jan. 2d, 1756. His amiable character gained him the esteem of all ranks and denominations; and to do justice to his memory this is recorded, that his example was a lit pattern for all to follow who profess christianity." The Rev. W. Lee, the next Minister, removed to Sunderland in the year 1754, and was succeeded by the Rev. William Wood, M.D. son of the Rev. Aaron Wood, formerly Minister at Etat in Northumberland, and descended from a good family in Staffordshire. Dr. Wood was a man of great learning and piety, and previously to his settling at Whitby, had been, many years, Minister at Darlington. He practised as a physician, and died very suddenly at the house of a patient whom he was visiting. The patient was a lady in the last stage of a consumption. He was sitting by the side of her bed, when he suddenly fell upon it, and the lady having a pen-knife at hand, cut his wrist-bands, saying, she would perform that last sad office for so good

The Volume to which this memoir is prefixed, printed for the greatest part under his own eye, will afford a just and interesting specimen of the prevailing character of the instructions which he delivered from the pulpit. He never aimed at learned scriptural criticism, at the graces of composition, or the display of eloquence. His object was to deliver plain truths to a plain people, in a simple, unornamented style, in a serious and affectionate manner; anxious not to gratify the imagination, but to improve the understanding of his hearers; not to obtain popularity, but "to commend himself to every man's conscience in the sight of God," and to make those committed to his care, "wise to salvation." Deeply impressed by the unerring wisdom and the infinite goodness of the Creator and Governor of the world; accustomed devoutly to contemplate his works and his providence, and to deduce thence motives to gratitude and obedience, to confidence and love, it was the earnest desire of his heart to make those whom he was called to instruct, partakers of his joy; by impressing on their minds the pious sentiments which had taken full possession of his own; by fixing their thoughts habitually on Him in whom they lived and moved and had their being; and by leading them to discern his hand in every object around them, and in every occurrence in life, and to derive from all they beheld and all they experienced the most powerful inducements to devote themselves to his will. The word of God was regarded and treated by him, not as the rule of faith merely, but of practice: and well knowing that "faith without works is dead, being alone," and at the same time fully aware how much easier it is to be sound in faith, than holy in all manner of conversation, he studied to give his preaching a practical character. The precepts of revelation as furnishing the complete rule of life; and the promises of the gospel, as supplying the most efficacious motives to a perseverance in all well-doing, were the topics on which he loved to dwell; illustrating and enforcing all the important lessons

of piety and virtue, which he deduced from the maxims of scripture, by those examples exhibited in its pages, and especially by that perfect pattern of excellence displayed in the temper and conduct of the illustrious founder of our faith. If he refrained in his public discourses from touching upon topics which many, justly perhaps, esteem essential to the purity of the christian faith, this is not to be attributed to any feelings of indifference, or distrust, but to his having regarded them of too controversial a character to be admitted into the pulpit; and to the habit of his mind, which led him in all cases to prefer the practical to what he deemed the speculative. He was by no means an unconcerned spectator of the state of religious opinion in the world, nor was he reluctant to bear his testimony against what he deemed the most fatal corruptions of the christian doctrine. He beheld, with the deepest regret, superstition and fanaticism usurping the place of rational piety, of sober views of life, its duties, its enjoyments, and its end; noisy pretensions to superior sanctity obtaining the credit and esteem which belong to genuine christian humility, and retiring, unostentatious devotion. He was grieved to see a daily increasing importance attached to faith in mysterious doctrines, to internal delusive feelings, to an almost ceaseless round of external religious exercises, and to an ascetic renunciation of the innocent amusements of life; to sentiments and practices unconnected, if not inconsistent with the due discharge of the private, social, and domestic duties, not necessarily accompanied by a true devotion of the heart to God, by well governed affections, or a blameless and a useful conduct. These he apprehended to be more injurious to the cause of real religion than the most determined infidelity;\* and against these therefore he warned his hearers with a frequency and an earnestness which their increasing popularity and their evil

\* See "*A Plain Statement of some of the most important Principles of Religion, &c.*" 1st Ed. p. vii.

tendency seemed not only to justify but to demand. And while in his public instructions he conscientiously endeavoured to counteract the effects of the antichristian dogmas of those who arrogate to themselves exclusively the character of the true disciples of Christ, and inculcated the more rational, more pleasing, and more practical principles on which the first preachers of the gospel so largely insisted, "in all things he shewed himself a pattern of good works." By his unblemished integrity, by his exemplary attention to the demands of every social and domestic relation, by the habitual cheerfulness of his heart, by his calm resignation to the will of God, by his faithful employment of the talents entrusted to him, and by his universal charity, he manifested how usefully, honourably, and happily, the principles he professed and recommended would enable those who cordially embraced them, to live.

As the leader of the public devotions of his people, he was greatly distinguished. His prayers, breathing a spirit of pure devotion, simple in their language, and uttered with a fervency which proved that they came from the heart, were well adapted to express the genuine feelings of rational, grateful, frail, penitent and humble worshippers, at the throne of the Supreme Majesty of Heaven and Earth, the Maker and the Judge, the Father and the Friend of man ; and at the same time could not fail to sustain and cherish in them a spirit of unfeigned piety.

In the year 1770, Mr. Watson married Hannah, the daughter of Christopher and Hannah Blackburn of Whitby. Mr. B. was a ship-owner, and had died when his daughter Hannah was an infant. This marriage connected Mr. Watson, with several of the principal families of the town ; and was during nearly 16 years, the source of much felicity. An increasing family rendering necessary an increase of income, Mr. W. was induced to receive under his care several young persons, some as day-scholars, and others, who came from a distance, as boarders in his house. For the office of an in-

structor of youth, he was peculiarly well-fitted, by the extent and soundness of his knowledge, by his conscientious regard to duty, by the kindness of his disposition, by the energy of his mind, and the vigour of his constitution. Attachment to mathematical science, and an extensive acquaintance with natural philosophy and natural history, rendered him eminently useful to pupils, who, by their birth and connexions in a sea-port, would, in many instances, be destined to naval occupations. There is scarcely any trust of higher importance, and which involves a more serious responsibility than that which is reposed in an instructor of youth; and no one but the man who is conscientiously scrupulous to perform his duty under the serious conviction of the momentous consequences that may result from his judicious attention on the one hand, or from his carelessness and indolence on the other, can rightly conceive of the labour, the discouragements, and the anxieties with which the faithful execution of this trust is inevitably attended. A wise and considerate parent well knows that no pecuniary recompence, much less the pittance which is commonly, and for the most part, so reluctantly given, can be an adequate remuneration for the services of a skilful and faithful preceptor, by whose unwearied assiduity, the mind of his child is stored with useful knowledge, and virtuous principles, and the rudiments of that character formed with which are inseparably connected respectability, satisfaction, and hope. He feels that the best friend of his child, who has also stood in the place of a parent, is justly entitled to the parent's esteem; and that benefits of inestimable value, as they may extend their influence beyond the limits of the present life, ought not to be lightly appreciated or forgotten. So thought several of the parents of those who were committed to the tuition and the care of Mr. Watson; and to his zeal, fidelity, and success, in the discharge of his important office, he owed some of his best and most constant friends. One of these, entertaining a high regard for his talents and his virtues, and desirous of testifying the deep



sense he had of the obligations he owed to him, offered to present him to a very valuable living in the Church of England, that he might hold it for his son, then a pupil of Mr. Watson; guaranteeing a certain and a handsome provision when his son should be of age to receive that living himself. Had he accepted this offer he might not only have lived in independance during the minority of his pupil, but have saved out of his income a considerable sum, which with the benefice his friend stipulated to procure for him on his resignation of the first, would have set his mind free from all anxiety respecting the pecuniary interests of his family. But tempting as such an offer must be to a person in Mr. Watson's situation, it was steadily rejected. Both of the doctrine and the discipline of the Church of England he conscientiously disapproved: the emoluments it offers, could not, therefore, be enjoyed but at the expence of integrity and peace of mind; and in deciding to which of these the preference should be given, he did not for a moment hesitate. Under the influence of the same principles, he afterwards resisted the earnest solicitations of another friend, a Minister of the Church of Scotland to return to his native country, and to accept a living there.

In the year 1776, Mr. Watson rendered an essential and a lasting service to the Town of Whitby, by establishing, with the assistance of a few friends, a Subscription Library. This was one of the earliest of these valuable institutions, which were first introduced, it is said, by the late Dr. Priestley, when settled at Leeds, and which have so largely contributed to excite and to sustain that general desire and pursuit of knowledge, which has eminently characterised the last fifty years. The Library at Whitby was at its commencement supported by *fifty three* subscribers; the number is now increased to upwards of *one hundred and twenty*. From its establishment till the year 1822, the excellent and venerable founder held the offices of President and Treasurer.

It was during this part of Mr. Watson's life that he was

honoured with the friendly notice of the late Lord Mulgrave, the highly celebrated navigator of the Northern Ocean; who being fond of scientific pursuits, found in Mr. Watson a congenial mind. The urbanity of his manners, the cheerfulness of his temper, the variety of his information, and the soundness of his judgment, were recommendations equally powerful to the notice of the present Earl; and the numerous instances of kindness shewn to him by the noble residents at Mulgrave Castle and the other branches of the family, contributed in no small degree to his happiness during a long course of years.

In the beginning of the year 1786, Mr. Watson was called to endure the severest affliction that arises out of the mortality of the human race, the loss of an amiable, affectionate, and beloved wife. On the 25th of February, Mrs. Watson died, after much suffering during a lingering disease; leaving in his charge a family of four children, (two having died in infancy) the eldest of whom was no more than twelve years of age, bereaved, at this important period, of the most valuable of earthly blessings, a kind and judicious mother. How acutely he felt this irreparable loss, the full weight of which can be appreciated only by those who have experienced a similar deprivation, an interesting paper drawn up on the mournful occasion, for his own private use, most strikingly testifies. With what fortitude he sustained this trial, on what principles he relied for support, by what hopes his sorrow was alleviated, and his spirit revived, he has clearly shewn in the two beautiful and pathetic discourses which he composed and delivered in reference to this affecting dispensation of Divine Providence; and which happily appear in the following pages.\* In the midst of those tears which nature bids to flow, and which neither reason nor religion can restrain or wipe away, he triumphed in the glorious prospect of the future re-union of

\* See Sermons VII. and VIII.

wise and virtuous friends in the world of immortal glory and unmingled felicity. "The happiest union here below," said the mourning preacher, "is often interrupted by a thousand circumstances, the unavoidable appendages of this imperfect world. Misfortunes hang over us in this vale of miseries, from which no care or prudence can defend us. But we shall meet our friends again in the region of perfect harmony and peace, the everlasting kingdom of our Father and our God; free from all imperfections. Our hearts shall never more ache for their troubles, nor suffer anxiety on their account. Never more shall we tremble for the issue of their tedious and painful disorders, or weep over them for those distempers which we can neither ease nor cure. Death shall never tear them from our embraces, and leave us forlorn and disconsolate. Never shall we have again to mourn for their loss, or feel again the want of their sweet counsel and assistance, weeping over the dear orphans they have left behind. How delightful will be our intercourse, when they and we shall be then changed, improved, and perfected!—Death suspends for a while the pleasing intercourse of friendship, but when we meet again, all virtuous connexions will be renewed and increased, and all will be triumph and joy."

The year 1788 was marked by another painful dispensation of Providence, the death of his eldest son, at the age of fourteen years. That a parent should follow his child to the grave, though seemingly contrary to the course of nature, is no very uncommon occurrence; yet it can seldom happen, without inflicting severe and lasting pain. That opening virtues and rising talents, encouraging and rewarding the assiduity bestowed upon their cultivation, by the promise of future usefulness and honour, should be consigned to an early tomb, while all around the sons of folly and licentiousness are permitted to rise up into manhood, to grow old in the ways of sin, and through a long course of years to spread the contagion of vice and misery, is one of those mysteries in the Divine Government which the human understanding in vain

attempts to explore. But the pious christian adores the wisdom which he cannot fully comprehend, and bows with humble resignation to the appointment which he firmly believes to be the result of infinite goodness. "It is the Lord, let him do whatsoever he pleaseth.—Clouds and darkness are round about him, righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne." No one ever possessed more just and enlightened views of the character and providence of God, or a firmer faith in the discoveries of the gospel, than the subject of this Memoir; and few have ever more fully experienced, or more illustriously displayed their soothing efficacy in seasons of affliction and sorrow.

In the year 1792, Mr. Watson first appeared as an author, in a work entitled "*Intimations and Evidences of a Future State.*" In collecting these, he observes, that "he makes no scruple of calling reason and natural religion to his assistance, and of gathering from different parts of God's works such things as speak immortality to man. He sees no ground for rejecting such useful auxiliaries, and building all our hopes on revelation alone." Having chiefly in view the conviction of unbelievers, he also deems it wise and necessary to combat them on principles which they themselves allow. He dwells therefore upon the general consent of mankind, and the universal desire of a future existence, as *Intimations* of such a state; and produces as *Evidences* of it, the faculties of man, both intellectual and moral, his affections, his dread of death, his capacity for religion, the immateriality of the human soul, the moral constitution of the world, and the moral perfections of its Maker and Governor. He then passes on to the consideration of the *Evidences* of a future state to be derived from revelation. But in managing the argument with unbelievers he is necessarily confined to such facts and principles as are generally admitted by those of them who are fair and candid. These are the instantaneous and perfect manifestations of Divine knowledge on the appearance of Jesus Christ; the doctrines and duties of the

gospel, and the character of its illustrious Author, and his apostles. The work is written in a pleasing popular manner, without "any deep researches, or any metaphysical subtleties;" and was well received by the public. A second Edition was printed in the year 1808.

A second part appeared in the year 1821, in which the author supports the argument from reason advanced in the first part, by additional observations; adduces further evidences of a future life from the doctrines and facts recorded both in the Old and New Testaments; collects many striking passages relating to the subject from ancient heathen philosophers, particularly Cicero; and concludes by shewing the probability of a future union of virtuous friends. Although in the first part, he had maintained the doctrine of the immateriality of the soul, he had avoided the discussion of the question between materialists and immaterialists; justly observing, that "the main question is no ways concerned in the solution; since to say that God cannot confer immortality on matter, affects one of the leading doctrines of the gospel, the resurrection of the dead." But in this second part he considers the doctrine of materialism at some length, and combats it with great energy. Viewing it as he did, (whether rightly or not, cannot be here determined) as "an unpleasant and gloomy system, rendering a future state extremely suspicious, and approaching nearly to the extinction of the best hopes of men," he was justified in stating fully his objections to this doctrine, and in strenuously opposing it; but it is much to be regretted that he has spoken, in several places, of the most distinguished modern advocate of the doctrine in terms too well adapted to strengthen the groundless prejudices that have been excited against him; and hardly consistent with the forbearance and charity which should be maintained between those who are equally sincere in their search after important truth, however widely they may differ in the result of their investigations.

Mr. Watson's next and perhaps most important work, en-

titled "Popular Evidences of Natural Religion and Christianity," appeared in 1805. Having settled the respective claims of religion, and philosophy, falsely so called, to the character of wisdom; inquired into the probability that there are beings in the universe superior to man, "but the manner of whose existence we cannot comprehend or explain;" and demonstrated the absurdity of Atheism, he proceeds to prove the existence and perfections of a Supreme Being. Taking a general view of the universe he adduces as Evidences of the existence, the unity and the providence of God, the connexion, harmony, and preservation of all things. He then descends to a more particular examination of some of the most important or striking parts of nature, and shews what the sun, the moon, the stars, the seasons and the ocean depose concerning the being and perfections of God. The animals that inhabit the earth, and particularly man, are last of all produced as confirming and illustrating the power, wisdom, and goodness, of a supreme and intelligent Creator. Having in his observations concerning man, clearly shewn that he is formed for religion, he proceeds in a second part of this very interesting work, to exhibit in the same familiar manner the evidences of the truth of christianity, insisting chiefly upon these which are usually denominated *internal*.\* "Mr. Watson's acquaintance with natural history" it has been justly observed,† "enabled him to answer in a pleasing and satisfactory manner many of the old objections of Pliny and others, to the constitution and course of nature, and his management of the evidences of revelation is in many respects new and very ingenious: and the whole is written with such an easy cheerful simplicity, as to give his readers a pleasing idea of the character of God, as displayed in his works and his government of them; of the value of man as the most distinguished terrestrial creature of God; and of

\* Annual Review, for 1805, p. 139, &c.

† By the Rev. W. Turner, of Newcastle,—See Monthly Repository, Vol. XX. p. 624.

the importance of that gospel which allows him to look upon God as his Father, and invests him with the privileges and hopes of a highly-favoured servant and child of God." The fate of this excellent work was singular and unfortunate. The first part of it was ready for the press, and should have been published early in 1801, in which case it would have had the advantage of appearing before Dr. Paley's 'Elements of Natural Theology.' It is true that the two works do not interfere with each other; for although "they are nearly allied in title, and accord altogether in design, yet the plans are totally different, and the materials are no where the same."\* Dr. Paley's work however had preoccupied the public attention; and the author of the Popular Evidences, could not possibly, in such circumstances, obtain the reputation or the profit to which he was justly entitled. The delay, so much to be regretted, arose from an occurrence, to which it is presumed, no parallel can be found in literary history. "The manuscript having been sent to a London bookseller, was submitted by him to an author of considerable eminence, whom he was in the habit of consulting, for his judgment upon it: in the hands of this gentleman it remained several years, and when returned to the author," after repeated and most pressing applications, "it was" in so imperfect a state, "so altered by corrections, curtailments, and additions, as to be in many parts illegible; and, at least in the author's opinion, by no means on the whole improved; at all events it could not appear as his work: it was therefore necessary to have the manuscript re-transcribed;"† and to re-compose such parts as had been lost or destroyed. A second Edition of this very pleasing and useful work was published in the year 1808.

The chapel which had always been small and inconvenient, having fallen much into decay, was, in the year 1811 rebuilt, by means of liberal contributions, not only from the members

\* Popular Evidences, p. 22.—† Monthly Repository, *ubi. sup.*

of the congregation, but also from distant societies and friends. Upon the opening of the new chapel, Mr. Watson, although he was then in his 68th year of his age, undertook an additional evening service on the Sunday ; which, owing to the uncommon vigour of his constitution, he was enabled to continue during nearly ten succeeding years. He was induced to make this exertion, not because he approved of a multitude of public services, but in compliance with the spirit and taste of the times, and the custom of the several religious societies which had sprung up in Whitby since the time of his settling there. He would not willingly have broken in upon the season of domestic religious instruction and of family devotion ; nor have countenanced a practice which he regarded as tending to cherish a pharisaic temper, and to render men more attentive to the external form than to the inward power of godliness. But in the circumstances in which he was placed, he thought he was called upon to oppose zeal to zeal ; and while he afforded the serious inquirer an opportunity of becoming acquainted with the truth, to prevent those for whose spiritual welfare he was ever solicitous, from being tempted to wander into error.

In the course of the same year appeared "A Plain Statement of some of the most important principles of religion as a preservative against infidelity, enthusiasm, and immorality." The foundation of all religion must be laid in a firm belief of the existence of God, and in just conceptions of his perfections, providence, and moral government. Mr. Watson's first care, therefore, in this work, is to inculcate just and rational views on these important subjects ; and to guard his readers against those misconceptions of them which appeared to him so generally to prevail, in what is called the religious world, to the discredit and the detriment of true piety and virtue. He then proceeds to notice the characteristic doctrines of revelation, and dwells particularly upon that of repentance ; since the most commonly received opinions of the nature and effects of repentance are not only, as he thought, without



scriptural foundation and support, but adverse to christian morality. Religious duties next claim his attention; and the errors which prevail concerning these are freely and forcibly stated. Perceiving that in "the estimate generally formed of the religious life, great reliance is placed on the inward feelings," he shews how delusive a test of religious character these feelings form, and how fatal the stress so commonly laid upon them is likely to prove both to the virtue of those who rely upon them, and the credit of the christian system in the eyes of unbelievers. And he concludes this excellent work, so well suited to the exigencies of the times, by a brief statement of the sanctions which the gospel proposes to enforce obedience to its precepts.

It was not, perhaps, to be expected that a work of this nature, so directly opposed to the prevailing sects of the day, exhibiting such sound and rational views of religious faith and practice, and establishing with such force of reasoning, the utter worthlessness and insignificance of every substitute for christian morality, should be suffered to pass without censure and opposition. It was accordingly attacked by some of the Periodical works of criticism; and also by a Minister of one of the Dissenting Congregations in Whitby, in a Tract entitled "A Vindication of the Evangelical Principles of Religion." In answer to this, Mr. Watson published in 1812, his "Evangelical Principles Exemplified." This treatise contains a succesful vindication of himself, and an ample justification of his views, but partakes rather too much of the character which too commonly belongs to polemical writings.

A second Edition of the "Plain Statement, &c.," appeared in the year 1814, containing several important additions; amongst which is a chapter on Predestination; a doctrine, which taken in the Calvinistic sense, the author demonstrates to be as repugnant to revelation as it is to reason; as dishonourable to the character of God, as it is distressing to the apprehensions, and dangerous to the virtue of man.

In the year 1812, Mr. Watson published a small but valuable compilation, entitled "An Useful Compendium of many important and curious branches of science and general knowledge, digested principally in plain and instructive Tables, &c." This compendium embraces a variety of articles, relating to Astronomy, Chronology, Geography, Sacred History, Prophano History, both antient and modern, Weights and Measures, &c., and is of great "utility" as the author justly observes, "for referring to on many occasions, where the memory cannot be a safe guide." Some entertaining problems founded on the powers of numbers are added at the end of the work; "designed to give young men a relish for speculations of this kind, and thus preserve them from idleness, or pursuits consistent neither with health nor innocence."

Having stated, in the account of the Chinese Calendar, in this little work, that the Chinese have no weeks, he observes "This is contrary to what Duhalde asserts, but I am assured it is the fact." His authority for this statement, was most probably, a very intelligent person, Mons. Richenet, a French emigrant, who settled at Whitby in the year 1794, as a teacher of the French language; whose highly cultivated understanding, and amiable manners, recommended him to the notice and esteem of the most respectable inhabitants; and amongst them to Mr. Watson and his family, with whom he became particularly intimate. Having resided at Whitby till the year 1800, he was sent by the Catholic Missionary Society to China; and from that period till his return to Europe in 1815, a regular correspondence was carried on between him and Mr. Watson. His letters, containing a journal of his travels, were in the highest degree interesting and instructive; the information they conveyed respecting the country, the habits, manners, and customs of the inhabitants of China, being, as far as it went, more accurate than any published account we have of that extraordinary nation. He had nearly reached Peking,

where he was to have been fixed, and whence he would certainly have communicated to his correspondent many curious particulars, when, in consequence of the proceedings of some Europeans at that place, which revived the jealousy of the Chinese government, he was ordered instantly to return to Canton, and, with all the other Missionaries, to leave the country. Mr. Watson was often desirous of extending the valuable information contained in the letters of M. Richenet, beyond the narrow circle of friends to whom they were shewn; and it is much to be regretted that he could not decide in what way this could be done with propriety and effect.

With the conceptions he had formed of the character of the Supreme Being, of the nature of true religion, of the duty and the interests of man, Mr. Watson could not behold, without the deepest concern, the progress of fanaticism, and the different doctrines and practices adverse as he thought to the spirit of the gospel, to genuine piety and virtue, to the comfort of mankind, and the cause of christianity : and he considered himself as bound to use every means in his power to expose the fallacy and the danger of the religious principles so widely adopted, and to bear his testimony in favour of the calm, unostentatious religion, exemplified by our Lord and his primitive disciples. Under the influence of this conviction he published in the year 1816, some valuable "Dissertations on various interesting subjects, with a view to illustrate the amiable and moral spirit of Christ's Religion; and to correct the immoral tendency of some doctrines at present popular and fashionable." The topics on which the excellent author treats are for the most part the same as those discussed in the "Plain Statement, &c." to which indeed this work may be regarded as supplementary. The character of true religion is first briefly drawn; and with it are contrasted false religion and its branches, particularly enthusiasm and superstition. And since these owe their existence and continuance to the want of a due exercise

of reason, the absurdity and danger of rejecting the use of this faculty in matters of religious faith and practice are fully and ably demonstrated. The nature and the object of faith are next pointed out; and the errors commonly prevailing on this important subject are exposed and refuted. Some of the principal perversions of the plain and practical doctrines of Christ are then noticed, and their injurious consequences clearly shewn; such as, the natural inability of man to do good; the reality and efficacy of sudden conversions; coming to Christ; and the possibility of death-bed repentance. Some very valuable and useful observations follow, on the comparative importance of principal and secondary duties; or of the great moral duties and religious observances: on the Sabbath; and internal feelings. The volume concludes with some pleasing and sensible remarks designed to shew that cheerful and innocent amusements and recreations are not inconsistent either with the spirit or the express injunctions of Christ.

In the following year he again appeared before the public at the request of the Rev. W. Turner, who being engaged in compiling and partly composing a set of family prayers for the use of the Newcastle Tract Society, and having had frequent occasion to admire the simplicity, and at the same time appropriate variety, with which he conducted these domestic services, applied to his venerable friend for his assistance, which was very kindly and promptly granted. "The manuscripts which were transmitted," Mr. Turner observes, "were so much beyond his expectations, both as to number and variety of subjects, that he thought it right to print them as a supplement, under the title of 'Devout Social Addresses or Prayers, adapted to various circumstances and duties of the christian life, offered as Helps to Heads of Families in the conduct of domestic worship.' " \* To this admirable little manual of devotion, printed under Mr. Tur-

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\* Monthly Rep. ubi. sup.

ner's direction at Newcastle, an addition, was printed by the author at Whitby: and in the year 1820 the whole was republished and enlarged with the following title: "Prayers adapted to various circumstances of the Christian Life; offered as Helps to Devotion. Objections to this Duty answered; and Prayer presented as a rational, edifying and important service."—"This little work," says the pious author, "I dedicate to the members of my small congregation, as a mark of my cordial regard and grateful remembrance; and to encourage and support that rational Piety, which, in my public exercises, it has ever been my wish to promote." Nothing could be better adapted to this important end. A spirit of pure, fervent yet rational devotion breathes through every page: and there is scarcely a situation or occurrence in human life, to which some sentiment of piety very happily appropriated may not here be found. The introductory remarks on the duty of prayer are ingenious, satisfactory and impressive.

Mr. Watson had passed the limit assigned to the life of man by the Psalmist, and "by reason of strength" had nearly reached, with little "labour and sorrow," as he gratefully acknowledged, to "four-score years:" the world which had afforded him so much pure enjoyment, as exhibiting such numerous and such striking marks of the wisdom and benevolence of God, and connecting him, by such strong ties of affection with many of the excellent of the earth, was passing rapidly away; and "the graves were ready for him." Feeling in himself the calm composure and the perfect satisfaction resulting from just views of the appointed change to which he had so nearly approached, he regarded it as a sacred duty which he owed to his fellow pilgrims, to establish in their minds those principles which had taken full possession of his own; and to assist them in overcoming that fear through which so many are all their life time "subject to bondage." With this design, so worthy of his character and station, he published in the year 1819, a curious and very

valuable work entitled, "Various views of Death, for illustrating the wisdom and benevolence of the divine administration, in conducting mankind through that awful change." The author begins with some remarks on the principle of life; the different degrees in which it is imparted to different creatures, and the proof which its preservation in all exhibits of the care of divine providence. However its duration may vary in the various species of animals, yet in none is it permanent; at some period it must be extinguished; death must take place. Death is in itself, no doubt an evil; yet it is absolutely necessary in the present constitution of things, to prevent other evils of far greater magnitude. Diseases are the general instruments in bringing on this important and awful change; and as these arise from many causes, and the human frame is liable to their attacks in every period of its existence, the time at which death may take place is wisely and kindly rendered altogether uncertain, and much valuable instruction is conveyed to the human mind, tending to prepare those who are exercised by them equally for life and for death. War is another instrument by means of which multitudes of the human race have in all ages been removed out of life: a terrific evil, as the experience of all ages has proved; yet like other evils, under the controul of divine wisdom and power, often rendered subservient to the improvement of the human race. Mr. Watson asserts that it is necessary and unavoidable, and treats the expectations and the labours of those who are desirous of exterminating war, and of introducing universal and perpetual peace, as altogether visionary. There are unquestionably great difficulties connected with this subject, and the advocates of peace may in some instances have been weak and inconsistent, yet so numerous and so great are the calamities which they are desirous of removing, so benevolent the object they wish to obtain, and so powerful the obstacles with which they have to contend, that they appear to claim from every friend to human happiness, and from

every subject of the Prince of Peace, applause and encouragement rather than censure and disapprobation. Having noticed some of the most general means by which mankind is removed from the present state, Mr. Watson proceeds to point out the benefits arising from the prevailing dread of death; and also from the uncertainty of its arrival; and by this last topic he is led to some forcible observations on the folly and presumption of the attempts which in every age have been made to discover preternatural indications of "those times and seasons which God hath kept in his own power." Natural warnings there are of our perpetual liability to death, sufficient to prevent an utter inattention to our end, and to urge us to constant diligence in preparing for the change which must take place. Commonly as we see this change passing on all around us, the true nature of death, like the principle of life escapes our observation: of the sensations which accompany dissolution, no one can previously conceive: much less can any living man know its results: all that survivors can perceive is the corruption of the bodily frame, and this process of corruption suggests the proper mode of disposing of the lifeless corpse. The author takes this opportunity of detailing the various means which have been employed in different ages, and countries, to pay respect to the dead, in opposition to the manifest design of nature, that "the body should mingle with the earth from which it came." He concludes, by shewing how kindly it is ordered, that the attachment to life should be weakened, generally, by disease, the infirmities of age, or the trials of life; while, the mind of the christian is reconciled to death by the promises of the gospel, and the anticipation of a reunion with virtuous friends in everlasting and unchangeable felicity.

Shortly after the publication of this important and interesting work, Mr. Watson's friends had reason to apprehend that the great change which he had contemplated with such true christian philosophy, was at hand; and that the happi-

ness they had so long enjoyed in his society, his instructions and example was about to be withdrawn. Symptoms of an alarming nature, but transient in their duration had appeared before; but in the summer of this year they assumed a much more serious character. While on a visit to the late archdeacon of Cleveland, the Rev. J. Bailey, at Stainton, his mind became suddenly bewildered; his recollection forsook him, and though not reduced to complete insensibility, he continued several hours in a state of very imperfect consciousness. A few weeks after this he sustained a much severer attack of the same disease. The writer of this Memoir, who was on a visit at his house, had perceived during breakfast some incoherence in his ideas, and an indistinctness in his utterance; and as they were leaving the room together, his venerable friend fell suddenly into his arms, apparently lifeless. Such however was the strength of his constitution, that it resisted the force of this attack. After lying insensible till the afternoon, and being bled both at the temples and in the arm, he slowly recovered; and on the following day, was as well and as cheerful as usual; feeling no other inconvenience than that of weakness from loss of blood. From this period he became subject to similar seizures, though they ultimately became weaker; and more like fainting fits; but always rendering him unconscious during several hours of what was passing; and occasionally impairing for some time his sight and his understanding. In the intervals his health was good, and he continued to enjoy his existence; being still capable of great bodily, and no inconsiderable mental exertion.

These attacks were peculiarly distressing to him, when they occurred, as they sometimes did, so as to interrupt or prevent his public services on the sabbath day. "A constant intermixture with religious offices," during a space of more than fifty years, had not "induced" on him "insensibility to religious impression." The work in which he had been so long engaged, was a work in which he delighted still; and



inability to pursue it with the vigour or the constancy with which he had hitherto accomplished it, was the severest part of the trial that the infirmities of age imposed. The zeal of his son\* and of his eldest grandson lightened his labours and provided for his people means of religious instruction, when he was unable to lead their devotions, or to address to them the words of religious counsel. But the interests of the Congregation, and his own comfort also, required more effective aid; and after long and anxious inquiry, he succeeded in the early part of 1821 in obtaining as an assistant, the Rev. James Rutherford, a native of Scotland; whose services have proved so acceptable to the Congregation, that since the death of their late venerable pastor, they have unanimously chosen him to be his successor. Still so devoted was he to his work, so habituated to exertion, so desirous of employing to their full extent, and to the latest moment the powers mercifully continued to him, that till within a very short period of his death, when not altogether disabled by disease, he preached twice every Lord's day.

Among those fruits of the labours of former years, which he had withheld from the public, there was a treatise extending to some considerable length, "On the causes, the evidences, and the consequences of Infidelity." It had remained in the state in which it has been found amongst his papers from about the time of the publication of the "Popular Evidences," if not from an earlier date. Not many months before his death, he informed the writer of this Memoir, that he had "set his heart upon its appearance;" and it is highly probable that it would have appeared, had he felt himself able to revise with the attention it required one part of this work, relating to the 'Inspiration of the Scriptures.' On this subject he had read much, but had never met with

\* Mr. Thomas Watson, Solicitor at Whitby; who, with two sisters, survives his venerable parent. Hannah, the eldest of the sisters, lived with her father. Ann, the youngest, married Mr. J. Anderson of Whitby, by whom she had three sons, all resident in Whitby.

any thing that satisfied him : on this subject he had also thought deeply and written much ; but something was wanting, which it was now too late for him to supply. In this treatise there are such admirable and seasonable observations on the opinions and practices of the popular religious sects in this country, and their tendency to produce and to perpetuate infidelity ; so much clear and forcible argument to prove the unreasonableness both of the objections to revelation urged by unbelievers, and of the grounds on which they attempt to justify their unbelief ; and so many striking and impressive remarks on the effects which infidelity must produce on society at large, on the various social relations, on morals, and on the comfort and the hopes of man, that it is matter of deep regret, that the excellent author delayed the revision of so valuable a work, till his day of close mental exertion was past.

Happily there was one other work to which he did feel himself equal, even in the last year of his protracted life, and on which he entered with habitual earnestness and alacrity ; but the completion of which he was not permitted to see. Knowing that “ shortly he must put off the tabernacle ” of his flesh, he thought it meet to endeavour that they whom he had so long, so diligently and so faithfully served in the gospel of Christ, “ might be able after his decease to have always in remembrance ” the important truths which it had been the great end of his public instructions to establish in their minds. For this purpose he determined to select and publish some of the discourses which in the ordinary discharge of his duty he had delivered to his people. The Volume here presented to the public is the result of this determination. They for whose benefit it was immediately intended cannot fail to receive and prize it as a sacred legacy from their aged and much venerated pastor ; they will be reminded by it of the happiness they have so long enjoyed in listening to such instructions, and incited to maintain with steadiness, and to adorn, by a holy,

consistent conduct, the truly christian principles which have been inculcated upon them. It may surely be hoped that it will also recommend to others those liberal, enlightened, and practical notions of the character and government of God, of the gospel of Christ, and of the duty and expectations of man, with which the interests of religion, and the comfort and happiness of the human race are intimately connected.

Thus engaged in the service of God and his brethren, and occupying his talents with such diligence and fidelity, he was found by Him who had assigned him his work, and taken to that scene of righteous retribution which had ever been the object of his warmest faith and his liveliest hope. During the greater part of the summer of 1825 he had enjoyed his usual state of health; subject indeed to frequent and sometimes very distressing and alarming attacks of disease, but in the intervals capable of considerable exertion, still taking great delight in the pursuits to which he had been accustomed, and deriving much enjoyment from the society of his family and friends. On Sunday August 21st, he preached, as usual, in the morning; and although in consequence of the uncommon heat of the weather, he had been much exhausted by his exertion, he was with difficulty dissuaded from undertaking the service in the evening. On the following Thursday he made his usual round of visits to his son, his eldest grandson, and some of his particular acquaintance; but in the evening slightly complained of indisposition. The disorder of which he complained being one to which he had been long subject, and which had always soon and easily yielded to a simple remedy, no particular apprehension was felt; especially as he himself observed before he retired to rest that he was perfectly recovered. During the night however the disorder returned with increased violence, and from that time till Saturday evening he continued in a very weak and alarming condition. Some favourable symptoms then appeared, and his afflicted family eagerly indulged the hope that the crisis was past

and the dreaded separation for a season still, in mercy to them, deferred. He passed a better night; in the morning he recognized those who were watching around his bed; their eyes rested again with joy upon his countenance marked by returning intelligence; the sound of his voice fell again upon their delighted ear announcing to them that 'he was well'; but alas, this was but a passing gleam; the last effort of a frame of no common vigour: a few uneasy restless minutes soon succeeded; he relapsed into stupor and insensibility, and in this state remained till about five o'clock on Monday morning, when he gently expired.

Thus full of days and honour, of faith and hope, was this aged servant of God gathered to his fathers. Few enjoy so long, still fewer, it is probable, so happy a life. If he abounded not in what are usually esteemed the good things of this world, he was very far from being destitute of them; and moderate desires, a complacent and a cheerful temper, a disposition to be not merely contented but pleased with his lot, and a heart fixed upon high and worthy objects, were treasures superior to any which the world has to bestow, and secure from every external accident. So protracted an existence in this ever changing scene could not escape the vicissitudes to which all earthly things and all human affairs are liable; yet as he knew how to turn the prosperities of life to the best advantage, so he had wisdom to extract from its adversities all the good they were designed to administer. In so lengthened a journey many of his companions on the way would inevitably drop off, and a heart so warm and so susceptible of the kindest emotions, must, on such occasions, have felt many a bitter pang; yet many remained, or took the places of those whom he had lost to cheer the end of his pilgrimage with every office that the truest friendship could render; while they to whom he was most closely allied and most strongly attached, rewarded all his anxiety and realized his fondest hopes, by occupying highly respectable and useful stations in society,

with advantage to others, and increasing honour to themselves. And at all times and in all circumstances, he had within himself, in his views of the perfections and providence of God, in the testimony of his conscience, and in the hope of a glorious immortality, that peace and joy which the world cannot give nor take away. Thus "his age was clearer than the noon-day; he shone forth; he was as the morning. In a full age he went to the grave, as a shock of corn goeth up in its season."

C. W.

York, }  
MAY 2, 1826, }

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## SERMON I.

### GENESIS i. 1.

*In the Beginning GOD created the Heaven and the Earth.*

**THIS** sentence stands with the utmost propriety, at the head of Revelation. It introduces us immediately to the knowledge of God, and teaches us, that every thing we behold, that every thing which we possess and enjoy, comes immediately from God ; that the world had a beginning ; that the heavens, the earth, and all creatures, are his workmanship, dependant absolutely upon him. Here then we find a cause, equal to this mighty work ; and a solution to all the difficulties which men have created, relative to the origin of this universe. We are assured here, that this world is not from eternity, but formed in time ; that it was not produced by the accidental concourse of atoms, which is the ridiculous doctrine advanced by some philosophers, but that it was created by a Being of infinite wisdom and power. This doctrine strikes at the root of all infidelity, by introducing God as the creator of all things in heaven and in earth ; the former of our bodies, the father of our spirits ;



and, by this assurance, introduces us to the numerous and important relations in which we stand to him, and the duties arising from these relations. God is our maker, and from him we derive all the powers and faculties we possess ; to him we owe homage, gratitude, and obedience.

On reading this passage, I might have remarked on the beautiful simplicity of this narration. Matter so highly interesting, is crowded into the smallest space : the language is neither far fetched nor laboured, but perfectly easy and plain. No ornament is sought for, and no ornament is required. The importance and dignity of the subject, support its interest ; the greatness of the work commands our attention, and raises the mind to the greatest sublimity, that seeks for no foreign ornament to command our thought. *In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.* Every word here is of the highest importance. The beginning of time is the period when this mighty work was effected. The Greatest of Beings is the workman ; the effect is, the CREATION, making all things of nothing ; the extent of this creation is the heavens and the earth, the whole universe ; and not only all which we see, but every thing also that we can conceive. The performance was not a long, laborious, and tedious exercise, but produced instantaneously. *By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, and all the host of them by the breath of his*

*mouth* ; and all things were perfect ; for at the end of each day's work, God saw every thing, and behold it was very good.—After making some remarks on the words themselves, I shall offer some arguments for establishing our belief in this important doctrine, and shew the uses to which we should apply it.

It may be, in the first place, observed, that no particular time is fixed for this great work of creation. It is not said how long the world had existed, at the time that the historian records this great event ; whether it had endured 3000 or 4000 years : this is a point on which this history is silent. We are left to compute the age of the world from circumstances. Men calculate the duration of the old world from the lives of the Patriarchs, recorded with seemingly a considerable degree of attention, in the former part of Genesis, more particularly in the 5th chapter, where their genealogy is carried down from Adam to Noah. But this calculation is not entirely free from uncertainty ; first, because learned men are not perfectly agreed with regard to the length of the lives of the antediluvians ; and secondly, because there is some difference in the Hebrew original and the Greek version, regarding the numbers. Again, the period from the Flood down to Moses, is computed in a similar manner, and errors here will add to the general error. I might add, that the computation

is carried downwards to the Kings, in the same manner ; and in this manner men form their judgment of the age of the world. But allowing that there may be errors, great errors ; that the world should be considerably older than is generally supposed, this Sacred Book is not answerable for errors of this kind, for it nowhere directly affirms it. Neither would an error on this subject, in any degree affect the main articles of our religion. We are not told from what source Moses derived this part of his history : this part of his history is not of that importance, as to require to have been brought from Inspiration. What we are interested in is, that God did create the world, and this is clearly revealed ; but of the precise time we may remain ignorant, without affecting in any degree, our homage, our gratitude, or our obedience, or in the smallest manner our confidence or trust. The knowledge of the precise time is more an article of curiosity than of practical religion. If some persons should believe that it is much older than we make it, we need not quarrel with them ; it is not even worth the while to dispute with them ; all that we want and wish to establish is, that the world and all things therein were made by God.

The next thing that claims our attention in this history is, what we are to understand by CREATION. The common acceptation is, the forming all things from nothing. This is a different

and much higher exertion of power, than reducing matter already formed, into order ; the moulding and the fashioning of it, to raise up the several parts, such as the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. That by CREATION, we are to understand, the producing the original matter, appears very evident from this history ; for immediately after the narration in the text, he gives us to understand, that what was first produced was only matter, and matter without form or shape. It was a chaos, a confused mass of matter, void of ornament and life ; and the succeeding part of this history, is a relation of the digesting and reducing this matter into order and form, and raising up the several beautiful and magnificent parts of this glorious universe, and enlightening this world with the sun, the moon, and stars ; and enlivening it by the formation of the different animals ; and lastly, adorning it by placing man as the lord of this lower world, at the head of creation, and assigning to him a dominion over the earth. This act of *creating* is an instance of the inconceivable power of the Supreme Being, and of a power of which we have no conception ; this is a work belonging to God alone : and at our entrance upon the Book of Revelation, should fill our minds with the highest conceptions of the Creator, and call forth our reverence, our wonder, our adoration, and our praise.

Another consideration, which these words suggest, is the extent of the work described. "God created the **HEAVENS** and the **EARTH**." This certainly implies the universe ; and indeed the particulars are afterwards mentioned, the *sun*, the *moon*, and *stars*. But a question hence arises, whether all these were created at the same time, or that the intention is to describe this earth only in which we are chiefly interested, or of the solar system; that is, the sun, moon, and planets, with which this earth is more intimately connected. But such discussions serve only to gratify curiosity, or for amusement ; they are not necessary articles of our faith, to cultivate piety, and to promote *practical religion*. It is sufficient for us to know and believe, that they are all God's works ; but at what particular period they were created, we may not be able in a satisfactory manner to determine.

And this leads me to the *main subject*, the *evidences* that we have for creation. Without determining the time, the work itself is the strongest evidence of an almighty and infinitely wise Creator. If we meet with a magnificent mansion, where every thing is fitted up with the utmost order and regularity for the accommodation of a family, we must certainly infer that this is the *contrivance and work of a rational and intelligent being*, and intended for the habitation of man. We should be guilty of the great-

est absurdity, should we assert, that this has come here by chance ; that it is very possible it might have sprung up *by chance*. The person that should bring forth such *arguments*, most certainly we should reason with him no longer, because no reasons whatsoever could overcome such obstinacy. This is counteracting the first principle of reasoning ; and of how much greater absurdity must they be guilty, who assert that this world might have been produced *without a Creator, or sprung up without a cause* ; or, that it has *existed from eternity*. This amounts to asserting, that the *greatest possible effect has no cause* ; that *the greatest demonstration of power exists without any exertion of power* ; that a work of the *greatest order and harmony*, is no proof of a *Wise and Intelligent Mind*. We have only to open our eyes, and we must see every where *the hand of the Omnipotent Workman* ; we have only to think seriously, and we shall be convinced.

'There is no subject so difficult of comprehension, as, *what God is* ; and *the more we think, the more incomprehensible* ; and yet, there is nothing for which we have so strong and convincing evidence, as that there is a God, and that he is possessed of all perfection. *The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handy work* ; and to evade the force of the argument from his works, that there is a

God, and that he is almighty and infinitely wise, we must fall into a conclusion attended with the greatest absurdities—that this world must have existed from eternity. But if we allow that there is a God, possessed of all perfections, is it not much more reasonable to suppose, and much more pleasing and comfortable to believe, that this universe has been formed, in time, by this Supreme Being ; for it bears every mark of an all-powerful, intelligent, a good and beneficent Author. But if men fall into the absurdity of asserting the eternity of the world, in order to avoid acknowledging a God, here the difficulty is greatly increased indeed, and reduces us to the greatest absurdity—an effect of the most astonishing magnitude, grandeur, and beauty, and *without a cause* ! And should we be disposed to grant this, we are pressed further to account for the preservation of these works, and in the utmost perfection, and from eternity. All these immense bodies, floating in the expanse of creation, are supported by no visible prop, united together by no visible tie, directed and guided by no visible hand. What is it that prevents them falling into disorder and confusion !

This earth is hung upon nothing : it has been sailed round in all directions. What keeps it in that steady course from which it never deviates in the smallest degree ? Its annual, its daily revolutions, are performed exactly to the

smallest moment of time : can we believe that there is no power or wisdom to direct all these movements? none to preserve them? We must part with every principle of reason, before we can be brought to such conclusions. You perhaps find men who may be led to assent to such doctrines ; they may admit them from the love of singularity, and maintain them from obstinacy or conceit ; or for the sake of appearing wiser than, or different from other men. But it is impossible that they should be seriously believed, without supposing the brain being disordered, or the mental powers deranged. The astonishing works bespeak a workman equal to the extraordinary performances.

I might observe, in further confirmation, that in many nations, we find some traditionary account of the *Creation*. Men have differed with respect to time and other circumstances ; but in general they have allowed a beginning to the world. Some philosophers, from a love of singularity, and from an affectation of appearing wiser than the rest of men, have been found, who have advanced, that this world is eternal ; but their arguments are suppositions without proof, and so obscure and abstruse, that no man can perfectly comprehend them, and indeed of such a nature, that they cannot be comprehended or explained by themselves. But there are a number of circumstances that come in aid of the



general argument, and lead us to infer that this world was not eternal.

First, when we read the history of the world : that history never carries us back beyond a certain period ; we can ascend no higher ; and in all well-authenticated histories, that period corresponds nearly with the time Moses assigns to the origin of the world. The Romans, one of the most celebrated nations of antiquity, are still not old ; they are far short of the time of David or Solomon. The city of Rome was built about 746 years before the birth of Christ ; so that the origin of their state goes back not much above 2500 years ; but it is upwards of 2850 since David was king. The institution of the Olympiads, that point from which the Greeks, and many other nations, compute their histories, which is nearly as far back as profane history carries us with any degree of certainty—the institution of the Olympiads, I say, was nearly about the same time as the building of the city of Rome. Cyrus the Great, the founder of the Persian monarchy, and which was in the height of its glory long before the Roman power rose to any distinction, reigned about 559 years before Christ, and therefore considerably after the institution of the Olympiads. He was long after the prophet Isaiah, who foretold him, and Isaiah lived in the days of Hezekiah, who was long after David. But some profane history car-

ries us back to the time of the founding of the Assyrian monarchy, which was about 2000 years before Christ, and 300 after the deluge. But this part of history is exceedingly dark and obscure : here we have nothing like certainty. This general observation may extend to all these, that none of them carry us back beyond, or even to, the time assigned by Moses for the creation of the world ; no, not even beyond the time of Noah's flood. Now, if the world had been of an antiquity much greater than this, it is impossible to believe but that we must have had the history of the transactions beyond this period. All history could not have been invented so lately. But beyond this period, all is fable and conjecture. If we should suppose this world to continue 10,000 years longer, we cannot help thinking, that there will be then handed down a history as correct as human nature would permit, of all the things that are now known, of Assyria, Babylon, Media and Persia, Alexander the Great, and the Roman Empire. Such transactions, we cannot suppose, will ever be completely lost. And supposing that the world has existed now 10,000 years, what has become of all the records of antiquity ? The powerful empires that have existed during that period, are now for ever lost, and not the least remembrance of them remains.

To this we may add, that the origin of all arts and sciences is very modern. Astronomy is cer-

tainly the most ancient and the most interesting of the sciences, and has been cultivated from a very early period, but it is still modern. The calculation of eclipses is one of the most difficult and surprising parts of that science ; and the earliest of these was by Thales, the Milesian, and that was about 600 years before our Saviour. Astronomy is the eye of history ; it furnishes dates and periods, and enables men to examine the truth and correctness of historical facts : all this is modern. Navigation was but very imperfectly understood by the ancients, and they were ignorant of the wonderful property of the loadstone, which has contributed so much to the perfection of navigation and discovery ; and the application of this to navigation, was only about 6 or 700 years ago. Printing is but of modern date, an invention that has contributed so much to the advancement of knowledge.

Now if this earth had been of very high antiquity, it is impossible to admit that all these discoveries should have been left to modern times. We see then how all these circumstances strengthen our belief in the history of Moses, and confirm the fact, that the world was created in time. And this belief is strengthened by the concurrent testimony of the different parts and ages of the world. If some nations pretend to a higher antiquity, such as China, where we may meet with extravagant pretensions, but ill supported ;

they do not surpass the western parts of the world in knowledge, in arts or sciences, or natural history : in all these they are very much behind.

Now the work itself leads us to the knowledge of the omnipotent Creator, and to pay to him that homage and adoration due from all his rational offspring. The Apostle argues, Rom. i. 20, *For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse.* And the knowledge that this wonderful work gives of him, is that of a Being infinitely powerful, wise, and good. We cannot have a display of power more magnificent than what this world furnishes, nor of more perfect wisdom and intelligence, than what we see in this great work. It is far above our comprehension ; we cannot see the full display of either his power, his wisdom, or his goodness, on account of our limited capacities, and our confined situation. We can only take in a partial view ; we can neither take in nor comprehend the whole. We live on this earth, and of this we have a very partial and imperfect view : we find it connected, and forming a part of the solar system ; and this, extensive as it appears to our sight, even to our imagination, is only a small part of the universe of God. What wonder, what astonishment would it raise, could we see the whole

of God's works, and all the plans of his providence, reaching from the first creation, to the present day, extending also to every part of this universe, combining, regulating, and governing the heavens and the earth, and all worlds ! What must He be ! O Thou Great and Incomprehensible ! giving light to all, but canst not Thyself be seen or known ; filling all, yet imperceptible to all our faculties ! We cannot see God, for this sight would stupify and overpower our faculties ; but from the creation and from his works, we have the most powerful evidence, not only of his existence in general, but of all his natural perfections, of his eternity, immensity, almighty power, and infinite wisdom : the visible works lead to the invisible Creator. This power is the first thing that strikes us ; for nothing less than almighty power could produce such a work. We infer also His wisdom from the perfection of this plan. This earth, by the lowest computation, has continued for some thousands of years, without any amendment or repair, all going forward steadfastly and regularly. What an effort of human genius was the original construction of clocks and watches, and other machines, for measuring time ? and yet the utmost efforts of art have never been able to continue them to hold out longer than a few days, without assistance ; and during that period, few there are that will commit no error ; they are losing time or

gaining time ; they are affected by heat or by cold. What then must be the perfect wisdom of that all comprehensive and penetrating Mind, that has constructed this most extensive and complicated machine of the universe, in which there are so many different movements, and yet all fulfil their revolutions in the most correct manner, without the smallest error or deviation ? The sun is perfectly steadfast in his revolutions ; so the moon likewise fulfils her seasons ; and all the planets, and every wandering star, without any visible help from without, any repair, or any improvement. Here we see that perpetual and regular motion, which philosophers and mathematicians have employed all their genius to discover. But in this grand machine of the universe, there are thousands and tens of thousands of perpetual movements, that have never stopped from the first creation to the present day : no jarring or interfering principle to disturb the union or harmony of the whole. What evidence of infinite wisdom could we desire equal to this ! What evidence of an all-perfect Mind, residing in this universe, and governing all !

In the history of the first creation, at the conclusion of each day's work, it is said, that God saw every thing, and behold it was very good. So that we may infer, that the works lead us not only to the knowledge of almighty power and infinite wisdom, but also to the knowledge

of the most perfect goodness. Of this perfection, it is in many instances more difficult to form a correct judgment : some of the creatures we may think are not good, because they may not produce good immediately to ourselves : such, we may suppose, to be all the beasts of prey, all the noxious reptiles, &c. But we cannot see all the ends that each species of creatures is calculated to answer. We may think several of the elements are evil, and even hurtful : many would wish to have no thunder, no tempests, and no volcanoes ; and yet these terrible agents of the Almighty, may answer many good purposes, with respect even to men. They may be necessary to assist vegetation, to clear the air of noxious vapours, to purify it, to increase its current ; and in this manner to promote the general welfare both of man and of beast. So also may the noxious animals and the reptiles, the snakes, the serpents, &c. answer many good purposes ; they answer one evident end, which is, the preventing the too great increase of the lower animals, and this prevents hunger, scarcity, and famine, the greatest of all evils. The general character of God's works are all good. The light, the heat, the air, the earth, the water, the useful animals, their provisions, their food, and that food not interfering with the demands of the rational creatures—all these are undeniable marks of God's goodness.

Besides the text, from which we learn, in the most direct manner, that the world was created by God, we have other testimonies of the same kind, to the creation of all things by Him. *Our help*, says the Psalmist, *is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth* : and of Him it is said, in another place, that *He made the heavens and the earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein*. In other passages of scripture, we meet with the same sentiments, both in the Old and New Testament. The Apostles, in the Acts, ascribe the origin of the world unto God. At Lystra, Paul and Barnabas preach unto the people that *they should turn from their vanities unto the living God, who made heaven, and earth, and sea, and all things that are therein*. Besides the express declarations of scripture, we have other evidences that the world is not eternal. We have the testimony of ancient nations in favour of this principle. If they did not attain to the knowledge of God and his perfections, or to the knowledge of other doctrines of Revelation, we are not to ascribe their ignorance to a deficiency of capacity ; for we see their natural talents raised them to a pre-eminence above the rest of mankind, and in their writings, they have left proofs of the most exalted powers. But by their natural capacities they were not able to rise to the knowledge of the Creator. For this knowledge we are indebted to communica-



tions from God himself, and let us profit by such instructions, and direct the knowledge which we have received to practical purposes.

1st, The world being made by God, gives us room to believe that it may be destroyed by the same power. It does not follow, as a consequence, because it would be limiting too much the power of God, to say that he could not make a habitation everlasting, and the inhabitants immortal. But it leads us to admit, that he who created, can destroy, and that he can fulfil his declarations, that the heavens and the present earth shall perish ; and that he can create a new heaven and a new earth, wherein shall dwell righteousness. The heavens shall pass away with a great noise ; the sun, and its glorious light, shall be extinguished ; the stars shall fall from heaven ; the earth, with all its works, shall be burnt up. And in consequence of this final dissolution, the Son of Man shall come in his glory, with all his holy angels ; and he comes for the most important of all purposes, to judge the world in righteousness. This is a destiny in which all are interested, not merely as spectators, but as the subjects of God, who are at that season to receive their eternal allotment. Time then shall be no more.

The duty arising from this, is to strive to entertain just views of this earth, and to regulate our conduct accordingly. This earth had a be-

ginning, and we are assured that it shall have an end. We are to look upon it then only as a nursing place for the creatures that are placed thereon. It seems to have been fitted up principally for the use and service of man, to be to him an habitation for a short period, to give him time and means to prepare for his everlasting allotment. All its appointments are so framed, as to warn him daily of the uncertainty and instability of this world. The appearance of things is constantly shifting and changing; day is succeeded by night, summer by winter. The inhabitants are continually removing, to make room for new inhabitants. All is in motion; and as this earth is to have an end, it is to prevent us from setting our affections too much on the present state. It is not our home; it can afford us no settled place of abode. The spacious firmament and the heavens, are ever in our view, whilst we are here, to remind us of those blessed abodes, the residence of all that is great and good.

2d. But besides these duties, arising from the view of this world being uncertain, the text furnishes us with the views of other duties, and calls these to our remembrance. Who created this earth, and formed man? God. What duties do we then owe to Him as our creator? First, supreme reverence and adoration. This great power exerted towards us in the work of creation,

challenges from us this duty. *Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve ; and, Thou shalt have no other God before me.* The Lord Jehovah, he is God, and there is none besides Him. And that we might not worship any of the angels or the heavenly host, we are here informed that they are not our creators ; God only, and he is the living and the true God. This particular description of the work of creation, fills our minds with the most magnificent conceptions of the power, the wisdom, and greatness of God. And after these evidences of his almighty power and wisdom, can we doubt of the extension of that power to create everlasting mansions for the accommodation of his immortal creatures, and faithful and obedient servants ? He has given to us an ample display of his goodness in this lower world ; and may we not look upon this as an earnest and certain pledge of his goodness toward man in a more perfect world ? The glories of the other world may surpass the glory of the present, as much as the meridian splendour of the sun excels the midnight darkness : and man in his glorified state may be as much superior to man in his present imperfect state, as the noblest of the human race is exalted above the most imperfect of mortal creatures. Glorify him then in the present world, that you may be made partakers of his glory, when death shall be swallowed up in victory, and God shall be all in all.

3d. Another duty arises from the consideration of creation, which is gratitude. Being duly sensible not only of our existence, but of the distinguished rank in which we are placed, and of the many favours we have and do daily receive, our obedience should flow from a principle of gratitude and love. The work of creation may be regarded as an intimation of our future existence, for it at least greatly encourages and strengthens those exalted hopes. It shews that He has it in his power to confer immortality on man. He who created us at first, can create us anew. And the knowledge of the boundless extent of his works assures us, that in our Father's house there are many mansions and habitations fitted up for his faithful servants, when they are removed from the present state ; and then there can be no limitation to the duration of his work. We see a vast variety in the duration of created existence, both in animate and inanimate beings. In the vegetable life, we see plants springing up, and after a short existence, speedily wither and decay. Many of the vegetables for our nourishment, have but a short and transient being. The fine fruits are generally short-lived, and we cannot increase them beyond a limited period, but by the application of some artificial means. They perish like the creatures which they are destined to support, and in this remind us of our short and perishing existence. The most useful

production of the earth is corn, the staff of life, which is of a more hardy texture ; but its duration also, is only of a short continuance. Animals possess but a perishing life, though of various extents. Some things have a day only assigned to them as the period of their duration, and others are rendered capable of continuing many years. But that Being, infinitely powerful and wise, who bestows upon us our temporary existence, with equal ease can bestow on man an everlasting existence. *Let there be*, is sufficient. *By the word of the Lord were the heavens made.*

O thou Almighty Creator, to Thee we owe homage, gratitude, and obedience; and do Thou, who createdst us at first, create us anew in Christ Jesus ; rectify all the disorders of our understanding and heart ! And Thou who at first spakest light from darkness, enlighten our minds with the knowledge of Thyself, and guide us in that path which will conduct us to thy heavenly and everlasting kingdom !

## SERMON II.

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JOHN xiv. 2.

*In my Father's house are many mansions : if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.*

THE whole of this discourse is well adapted to the end intended, to console the disciples for the loss they were about to sustain, and to prepare them for the task they had to perform. It contains the clearest views of the future world ; that principle the most substantial to support man in his present trials. It gives us the strongest assurance of the union and connexion with his Father, and the intimate connexion between him and his disciples ; and this is one of the most powerful consolations in the day of trial. But though this subject is the most interesting to man, and so well calculated to call forth his best affections, and to elevate the soul, yet you find in this discourse nothing of the spirit of enthusiasm ; all is calm and rational ; but still it is not delivered in that cool and unfeeling manner, so as to deprive the subject of all interest, and to lead us to believe that Jesus Christ was not connected with those sublime objects that

his religion presents to man. It is impossible to read it seriously, without feeling those animated views with which our Lord was guided, when he spake this consolatory discourse to his disciples. The manner in which he speaks of the Supreme Being, is the most affecting possible. He addresses him as his Father, and his Father in heaven ; and no one can rightly contemplate the character of Christ, but he must admire and love his superior excellence ; and this will produce that rational love and obedience, which must be the foundation of every duty. How admirable and excellent does he appear, in the affectionate manner in which he speaks of his Heavenly Father, whether in scenes of joy, or under impressions of the deepest sorrow ! *I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, &c.* Here you feel his gratitude : and what a lesson is this to us who derive every thing from God ; and what effect must this gratitude produce in serious minds ! In scenes of sorrow, no complaint, but reliance on his Heavenly Father. This directs us in our conduct in similar situations. What confidence does this relation, as his Father, inspire in him ! At the grave of Lazarus, he lifted up his eyes and said, *Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me ; and I know that thou hearest me always.* What confidence must this inspire in that mind that is under the influence of this persuasion—his God heareth

him always. Such is the confidence that our connexion with him, founded on views of the excellence of his character, and our adherence to duty, will inspire. *We shall have confidence and encouragement to pour out our hearts before Him.* In the text, we see the whole universe is the house of his Father : what a pleasing prospect does this present to us, of that intimate connexion in which every thing stands to God ! However wide and extensive this world is, yet it is intimately connected with our Father, as his house, which he superintends and directs. All is under his eye, connected with him as the head of the whole family ; provided for, directed, and governed by God. This image, conveyed to us in the simplest language, gives to us an enlarged, but a most correct view, in its relation to the great Father of all. It gives an image different much from representing it as his kingdom and dominion. It is only his house ; it brings every thing under his eye ; every thing is under his immediate inspection and care. It is a house, where he resides, where he manifests his presence ; which he governs and fills. To us this world is of boundless extent ; we cannot, even in imagination, prescribe any limits : it evades the grasp even of our thoughts ; but however boundless, even in some sense infinite, yet it is no more than God's house ; and as the Father and inspector, nothing can happen, nothing can



escape his knowledge. He is much more perfectly acquainted with every part of this universe, than any father can be with what passes within the limits of his own house and family. Many things happen in the best regulated family, which even the most attentive father is ignorant of; but nothing can happen in the universe which God does not know. The heavens are God's throne, the earth is his footstool: this is a magnificent idea: we see his power there extending over all; but this falls short of the image which we derive from the language of Christ. From the simplicity of the description, one simple and familiar word comprehends every thing—his Father's house.

In this there are several particulars, which claim our attention, and furnish duties. First, his house contains all creatures, and all belong to his family. And what an extensive family has he! And he watches over, preserves, and feeds all. This earth is but a very small portion of his family, which to us appears so large, and which contains a variety of creatures of different sizes, forms, and powers. The sea, the dry land, the fowls of the air, the fishes, the large animals, and the smaller insects, all are parts of his household, and receive all from him. *He sendeth forth his spirit, and they are created; he hideth his face, and they die and return to the dust. O Lord, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom*

*hast thou made them all : the earth is full of thy riches.* We see here different apartments or mansions provided for his household, according to their natures or wants. Such as live in the waters cannot be inhabitants of the dry land ; and the inhabitants of the dry land cannot live in the great and mighty deep. Different climates suit different animals ; and all are furnished and fitted for the elements designed for them. With regard to his household, all is ordered with the most perfect knowledge ; He appoints each creature to its proper station, and the appointment is made with the most perfect wisdom. Angels have their proper office assigned to them, and are possessed of capacities and powers adapted to their stations. He gives to them their measure of knowledge, and their powers to execute his commands. Of this higher order of beings, we can form our ideas only from conjecture ; but it is not unreasonable to admit, that the rational nature may advance from the lowest degree, in an uninterrupted progress towards Him who is the supreme source and fountain of all. We see instances of its gradation in this lower world. Some in the human form possess those powers in the lowest degree ; their memories, their knowledge, their reason, all imperfect, greatly imperfect ; whilst those placed in the highest degree of the human scale, have all these in a much superior degree of perfection, rising

from knowledge to knowledge, improving upon what they have received from others who have gone before them, and have left their improvements recorded for the benefit of the world. What an amazing progress have some of the human race made in the knowledge of God's works! they have been able to trace out the laws which regulate the motions of the heavenly bodies, and have foretold all new appearances for ages to come. Now is it unreasonable to suppose, that beyond this narrow sphere, this insignificant world of ours, there may exist intelligences, as far exalted above man in their attainments, as the most perfect of our species rise above the lowest degree of rationality? They may have faculties much more perfect, memories which lose nothing of what they have once attained, reason unerring, and understandings to take in a wider range of the works of the Creator. They may be likewise possessed of the power of transporting themselves to other worlds, to know their inhabitants, and profit by that knowledge. They may have capacities which enable them to look into futurity, with the same ease that we see the present or review what is past. And if we add to all this the principle of immortality, we see the advantages which they must enjoy of a much higher degree of knowledge. They also may be in a constant progress; and if we further admit that their

faculties never weary, and are subject to no kind of decay, we see then creatures much more perfect than any thing which we can know here. These are the enjoyments reserved for good men in another state ; and the pleasure and perfection of happiness here set before us, should operate as a strong spur to care and diligence, that we may know hereafter more of these exalted beings. And this also is our comfort, that they are the children of our Father's house, and to them he has assigned their proper exercise and appointments ; and it principally contributes to the perfection of their states, that they know God more perfectly, and serve Him more faithfully.

We may believe also, that in our Father's house, there are beings much more pure and holy than any of the rational creatures in this imperfect world. Human nature is as much diversified by its purity, as by its powers and capacities. We see great degrees of wickedness in the earth : many give way to every evil wish, and gratify every evil desire, living as if there were no God, no future world, no punishment for the wicked, and no reward for the righteous. But at the same time we may hope, that there are many who govern themselves by a regard to God's law, studying to do his will on this earth, as the blessed angels do in heaven. Purity and holiness must be the distinguishing

marks of that branch of God's family which is in heaven ; their wishes and desires are all pure and holy. We may readily allow that there may be in those more perfect regions, many that may not arrive to the highest degree of knowledge ; but we cannot entertain the belief that there should be among them any thing that is impure ; for nothing that defileth can enter there. Knowledge there, as here, may be progressive ; and it will form one part of the employment of that blessed company, to be advancing in knowledge ; and here is work and employment that will engage them for eternity, to know God, and his works. Purity is absolutely necessary for happiness, but not perfect knowledge. These principles are confirmed to us by the doctrines of scripture. For in these happy mansions, there shall be no death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain ; so in like manner there shall not enter there any thing that is impure or unclean, that defileth, that is unjust, or that loveth or maketh a lie.

This view, then, which gives to us the qualifications of these inhabitants, points out to us what is our duty, that we should strive after these attainments, which will the best fit us for that immortal inheritance.

Further ; God is the supreme director of his household, and if he does not always act immediately from himself, yet such is the perfection

of his knowledge, that he will always select and appoint such instruments as may be the best for carrying forward his great designs, whether those instruments be inanimate, animate, or rational creatures ; such as the storms, the thunder, the lightning, the earthquakes, wars, famines, or the passions of men ; whatever instruments he employs, he superintends and directs all. The imperfection of the governments of men is owing to two principal causes ; first, their ignorance, and secondly, their want of power. They cannot tell what may be the best plan for effecting any particular purpose : they cannot see the opposition they have to meet with, or the difficulties they have to overcome. For sometimes the most promising plans of man, and schemes laid with the greatest skill and wisdom as he supposes, meet with such opposition and difficulties, as overturn and baffle all his art and powers. But the all-perfect Being sees every event, and makes choice of instruments the most proper to accomplish the ends which he designs. We see some instances of his works recorded in scripture, to direct us in the formation of our judgment. When the old world, on account of its wickedness, was to be destroyed, he employed water to be the instrument : at other times, this element is the greatest blessing to man. He called that water from heaven—the windows of heaven were opened ; he called it from the bowels

of the earth—the fountains of the great deep were broken open. When Sodom, and the other cities of the plain, were to be destroyed, he rained fire and brimstone from heaven—from that heaven from which he often showers down the greatest blessings. When Korah and his company were to be punished, he caused the earth to open and swallow them up. On other occasions, he counteracts the natures and powers of his creatures, to preserve his servants: the mouths of the lions were shut, and the violence of the fire was quenched, for the preservation of those men who were doomed to death on account of their adherence to truth and religion. Such are instances of the perfection of his knowledge in the government of his great family; that his plans cannot miscarry. This view affords consolation in difficult and trying situations, and on the removal of friends. They are carried to the mansions of bliss, but are still in his family, for this comprehends all. When Kings and Princes employ themselves in the management and government of their states and kingdoms, they are exposed to perpetual and great errors. From ignorance of character, they may employ Ministers who may be both weak and wicked. At the head of their armies, they may place Commanders without either courage, activity, or skill. No wonder, then, that we meet with such frequent miscarriages, without supposing any thing defec-

tive in the Kings or Princes themselves, but only such defects as we must expect to meet with in the world of men. It is through their Ministers that Princes come to the knowledge of the affairs of their dominions. But the Supreme Sovereign wants no information ; we not only live in His sight, but even in His embraces. His providence is everywhere present, providing for the sustenance and comfort of the whole, by the never failing return of the sun, the alternation of light and darkness, the benign influence of the heavenly bodies, the succession of the seasons, and by the fructifying rains and salutary gales : and all these are managed by Him with the greatest care ; there is nothing of which He can be ignorant. The father of a family is often in the greatest perplexity with the troubles and sufferings of his family and of his children, but cannot tell what is proper for them, and what is the best ; but the Father of the great family of heaven and earth, is perfectly acquainted with the situation of every part of His family. Those who have only one child, and direct their whole care and labour for the good of that child, are often ignorant of what is proper ; and though in other cases they may be perfectly acquainted with what should be done, yet from a foolish weakness and false affection, neglect to put it in practice. But the great Father of the universe, knows perfectly the state of each member of His family, their



weakness, their wants, their pains, and their diseases, and will give what is proper ; for He is not to be misled by any weak or foolish desire from doing what is right. He does not in every respect consult their inclination, but often forces upon them what He knows to be salutary. A father may be deceived by misrepresentation concerning the state of his household, so that with the best designs, he may commit great acts of folly ; but the Father of the universe cannot err, and He is liable to no change or shadow of turning : none of His plans miscarry. This is seen in the steadfastness of the revolutions of all the heavenly host.

Passing from these reflections, these words open another source of important instruction ; they point to a future world, in which we are all deeply interested. The doctrine of a future state, is not established in scripture by any formal evidence. Like the existence of the Supreme Being, it is taken for granted, and argued from as an established fact. But it derives its strongest evidence from Jesus Christ : his whole conduct bespoke that he belonged to another and a more perfect world. In his abode here, he took no interest in any thing, but what was connected with the will of his Heavenly Father. He lived altogether detached from the world and the things of the world ; he had no home or dwelling-place ; he formed no connexion in this life ;

he had no immediate family, but his disciples ; he took no share in any of the active offices or duties belonging to men, in conducting the governments of the world ; no interest in promoting the arts and sciences, in advancing the prosperity of his country, or in the cultivation of the fruits of the earth. He took not upon himself the office of a magistrate, of a governor, or a judge, but left the government of the world entirely to the management of the men of the world. And his refraining from interferences of this kind proceeded not from any sullen indifference to the happiness of man, to his hatred of society, to pride, to resentment ; for on the contrary, his sole labour was to make men happy : he was of the most benevolent disposition, and always ready to perform acts of kindness to every one who applied, indifferent whether they were friends or enemies. He was constantly doing good both to the bodies and souls of men ; he felt in the keenest manner for all the miseries of the human race, and extended his arm every where to grant relief. But his indifference and his want of concern for the worldly happiness of men, proceeded from his certain knowledge that this earth was not the everlasting habitation of the human race, but that he belonged to another world ; and hence his sole labour and concern was to prepare them for that state. His everlasting habitation was to be determined by his behaviour here ;

his care then was to form in his disciples those tempers and dispositions, and those habits and courses of life, that would the best prepare them for their everlasting mansions. By this we are to judge of every part of our Saviour's life. This will account for his manners, and for every part of his conduct, all intended to prepare men for his heavenly kingdom, for his Father's house, that glorious abode, which time cannot consume, that will be subject to no decay. Hence in him you meet with no worldly-mindedness, no attention to the world or the things of the world, an indifference to all these ; but on the other hand, the greatest ardour and earnestness to promote the happiness of men. He was not churlish, morose, or sullen, but on the contrary, cheerful and affectionate. He was found in the society of men, in the crowded cities, in the temple, in places of the most general resort. You find him eating and drinking. He sanctioned the marriage feast with his presence : he did every thing to promote the real happiness of mankind. All these are evidences from him who was possessed of the most perfect knowledge and wisdom, that there is another and a more perfect state.

Another evidence is from his conversation, and from the manner in which he spoke of the future world. On all such subjects, he speaks not as an enthusiast, who was above common sense and comprehension, but with the composure and

ease of one well acquainted with what was the condition of that abode : *I came from God, and am going to God again. In my Father's house are many mansions : I know that thou hearest me always ;* and that if his deliverance from his persecutors had been proper, he had only to pray to the Father, and he would have sent him more than twelve legions of angels. With what confidence does he address his Heavenly Father at all times : *Father, I come to thee ! Father, the hour is come, glorify thy Son.* Thus, both his manner and conversation bespoke him a citizen of another world.—Further, the manner in which he met death and sufferings, confirms all. He was perfectly alive to pain and sufferings : he knew well the bitterness of that cup which the Father had given him to drink ; but he shrinks not : *Thy will be done.* When the time approached, he advanced with the greatest cheerfulness to meet his sufferings, though he knew well what would be the final result of his sufferings upon the cross. He looks with certainty to heaven ; and hence, to the petition of the penitent thief, he answers, *To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.* He commits his spirit, as his last act, to his Heavenly Father : *Into Thy hands, &c.* In all his conversation, and in all his actions, he looks constantly towards his Father's house in heaven ; and his great works bear testimony to all his other evidences. His great

works prove him to be God's beloved Son, and the favourite of Heaven ; and they could answer no good end, but upon the principle that there was another world ; for the object of all these was to bring men to the knowledge of God, and to prepare them for eternity. And in the second place, they bear the strongest testimony to strengthen our belief of a future existence. Thou hast implanted in our breasts a longing after immortality, and a restlessness in every condition here, as indications that the present state is not our home ; and thou hast bestowed upon us powers and faculties that cannot meet with their full gratification in the present world. But we adore Thee, that thou hast confirmed and enlarged all these rational desires of nature, by sending to us thy everblessed Son ; and that he has given us the greatest room to hope and to trust, that the present state is no more than the beginning of our existence ; and that when *the earthly house of this tabernacle shall be dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.*—To the truth of all he did and said, God would never have conferred these striking marks of his favour upon a deceiver and an impostor, to mislead the world. All nature spake and said, at the time of his yielding up the ghost,—*truly this is the Son of God.*

To all these is to be added, the plainest and the most unequivocal of all evidences, his triumphant resurrection from the dead. This was the most undeniable demonstration of his favour with God, and of his interest in heaven ; of the high rank to which he was raised, and the earnest and pledge of our resurrection. Christ is the first-fruits. The greatest importance belongs to this article, and therefore the greatest care is employed to establish this fact. After his resurrection, he remained forty days upon the earth, to give to his disciples the most convincing evidence that he was really risen. They saw him, they handled him, they conversed with him ; they heard him converse on such subjects as none but himself could : and then afterwards, they received the gift of the Holy Ghost, which enabled them to speak and act conformably to their high appointments. By this they received the gift of courage, a necessary qualification to enable them to face all dangers ; a great change in this respect passed upon them. They received the gift of truth, so that they had the clearest view of all important truths. They received the gift of utterance, and so were enabled to speak readily on the most interesting of all subjects. They received the gift of fortitude, so as to decline no labours. They received the power of working miracles, of healing all manner of diseases, of which they gave many

proofs. Now all these happened exactly as Christ had foretold, and must have been to them the strongest assurance that he was entered into his glory, and had sent to them so powerful an instructor and guide. They become then evidence of a future state, that principle which is the foundation of all religion. All these are fair deductions from the doctrine in the text—*the house of his Father*. And the same power shall raise all his faithful servants from the grave, to make a part of the great family, the glorious family in heaven, in the more immediate presence of his Father, where they shall see him more clearly, and meet with a fuller display of his goodness and his love.

## SERMON III.

JOHN xiv. 2.

*In my Father's house are many mansions.*

THE more we are acquainted with God's works, the more propriety and beauty do we find in the language and doctrines of our Saviour. *Many mansions.*—Modern discoveries, aided by the most complete and perfect instruments, have taught us that the extent of the universe is almost boundless. Before men were made acquainted with these discoveries, they considered this earth as the only residence of rational creatures below heaven, and looked upon all those bodies that roll in the heavens, as subservient to man, and made principally for his use; the sun to enlighten this earth by day, and the moon and stars by night, and the whole host of heaven created for man alone. The system of astronomy, which obtained possession of the world till within much less than three hundred years, was constructed upon this principle,—that this earth was the centre of the universe, and that the sun and the whole heavens made daily revolutions around this insignificant spot; and so much did men interweave their religion with their astronomy, that those great men who opened the eyes of the world



to this gross error, were denounced as the greatest heretics, and threatened with those severe punishments, which the Pope and the Inquisition could inflict, unless they renounced such heresies ; and some of those eminent men were condemned to a course of severe penance, for asserting that the earth was not the centre of the universe. Such are the effects of ignorance in contracting our views of the Father of the universe, and in limiting the house of God to this small spot, which is not the thousandth part of the size of some of those bodies that are continually rolling in the wide expanse of the heavens, and which there is the greatest reason to believe, are inhabited by rational creatures, and perhaps by beings of more enlarged powers and capacities than man ; and that all parts of God's house are formed, preserved, protected, and governed by him. How much more conformable to sound philosophy, and more consonant to our conceptions of our Creator, is what our Saviour here declares, that in his Father's house there are many mansions, than that pitiful conception, that this earth, so insignificant in itself, is the only part of the universe inhabited by rational creatures. And from this enlarged view of the works of God, there are many pleasing inferences.

In the first place, this gives us ground to believe, that on our removal from the present state of being, good men shall be admitted into a more perfect

state, fitted up for their eternal habitation ; and that our Saviour is gone to prepare mansions for his faithful servants. We cannot tell where these abodes may be fixed, but that should give us no concern, for wherever they may be, they are part of our Father's house, not merely of his dominion, but under his paternal care and protection, where we shall see manifestations of his power, his wisdom, and his goodness, and see them more clearly in proportion to the improvement of our nature, and in proportion to that purity we shall attain ; for without purity and holiness, we cannot be capable of happiness, and these mansions are the abode of good men, and of our Everlasting Friend. There are some things which may distress us in such meditations : we cannot tell how we shall be able to take this distant journey ; but our spirits or our resurrection bodies may be so fitted up and perfected, that the transition from death to immortal life, may be only momentary—from the agonies of a death-bed to the presence and enjoyment of pure and blessed spirits. When speaking of the second coming of the Son of Man, it is as the lightning cometh from the east, and shineth to the west, so shall the coming of the Son of Man be ; and so sudden and easy may be the transition of the disembodied spirit or the resurrection body. After our Saviour rose from the grave, we find a great change had passed upon his body : he appeared suddenly

among the disciples, sometimes when the doors were shut, and he again vanished out of their sight. And after he had completed his forty days, he led them out as far as to Bethany, and blessed them, and while he blessed them, he was taken from them, and ascended up to heaven, and a cloud received him out of their sight, and they were permitted to see him no more. His body, then, after his resurrection, evidently had properties and improvements of which we could have no conception before. Paul says, in reference to this change, this mortal shall put on immortality ; it is sown a natural, it is raised a spiritual body. With these endowments and perfections, we need not be concerned about the distance or the space to pass through.

Secondly, we may infer, that it will require many mansions to contain the followers of the Lamb : of their numbers, we cannot, we dare not speculate, or on the proportion between the righteous and the wicked ; such speculations furnish no pleasure or edification. Our Saviour discountenances all such speculations, in his answer to the question, *Are there few that be saved ?* The apostle, in the Revelation, represents them as that multitude which no man can number ; and adds a beautiful and liberal opinion, that they shall be made up of all nations, languages, kindreds, and tongues, and may we not add, of all religions. Our Saviour countenances these liberal opinions, where

he says, *they shall come from the east, &c.* And the same principle is supported by the doctrine in the text, that *in his Father's house are many mansions.* This refers to the proportion of mankind that shall be admitted to happiness, that many mansions will be required for their habitation. This doctrine may admit, that there will be some distinction of rank even in heaven, but that distinction founded not on accident, not on partial favour, but determined by the state and condition of men, and their improvement in this state of trial. This has its foundation in reason. According as men are qualified, so will be their share and portion in the mansions of bliss. The apostle says, that there will be different degrees of glory, and refers for an illustration, to the different glory of the stars. *There is one glory of the sun, &c.* All the blessed inhabitants will be pure, without spot or stain, without any error of the understanding or heart, and consequently all happy; but some may be capable of more enlarged conceptions of the works of God, and be admitted to a more perfect knowledge of their Creator. But views of this kind may distress the reflecting mind, as they convey an intimation that we may be separated from our virtuous friends, in those regions of bliss, by not belonging precisely to that rank to which they belong. But different mansions do not imply that the blessed society above shall be ranked

in place, exactly according to the measure of their attainments. On this earth, people of different capacities associate together, without the smallest inconvenience ; the diversity of talent contributes to the beauty of the society : a union of virtues and good dispositions, contributes more to promote happiness. So in the regions of bliss, stars of different magnitudes may mix together, as we see is constantly the case in the heavens. But we need not trouble ourselves with any distressing meditations ; the righteous will repose in perfect satisfaction in the house of their Father, and in full conviction of being fixed and permanent. They will have all that knowledge and free intercourse that is necessary to their happiness. Their will will be fully absorbed in the will of their Father. They will no more be subject to the loss of friends, to disease or decay, but will flourish in immortal youth, and advance higher and higher in the knowledge of the ways and works of God. Their happiness will depend not on those things not in our power, not on exalted talents, which no man can assure to himself ; but it will be determined by their progress in holiness and benevolence, and by their love to God and to men. Again, these many mansions intimate to us, that the blessed company will be made up of good men from every nation, language, and religion, under heaven. There will be assembled good men from the old world,

good men of the Jews and Gentiles, and good men even of false religions. Abel, the first martyr, Enoch, who walked with God, and righteous Noah, will meet Abraham, Moses, Samuel, Job, and Daniel, in that universal kingdom, with the apostles of our Lord, with good men also who lived under the dark dispensation of heathenism, with good men, followers of the impostor Mahomet—all assembled in the house of our common Father, and all shall be blessed.

General reflections.—First, If we believe that we are in our Father's house, it furnishes us with great, with unspeakable comfort: our best, our dearest interests, will be taken care of, and in a degree much more perfect than by any earthly parent they can. Our earthly parents cannot perfectly see and know our wants; He seeth and knoweth all. And what they do see, they cannot in many cases prevent or remedy; but God can do all for our everlasting happiness. If in our Father's house, all his appointments are wise, and meant for our improvement and happiness, to Him we owe filial reverence, submission, and resignation. If we obtain not what we wish, let us believe that whatever is, is for the best; therefore we ought not to murmur or complain, for that argues a distrust of his providence and care.

Secondly, If in our Father's house, we belong to the whole family of heaven and of earth; for all his rational offspring are his children, and we

are all brethren ; therefore to all we owe love, and all the good services we can do to them. We are related also to all the higher intelligences ; and though at present we have not their privileges, their knowledge, and their happiness, yet let us ever look forward, and never lose sight of our high destination : we shall become more like unto them hereafter. Perhaps some of them were once as we are now. Such, then, as are now in an imperfect state, shall be advanced higher and higher, and partake of the angelic nature and happiness. And this relationship, and the prospects founded upon it, should teach us not to despise those who are at present below us in knowledge and in privileges. The continual progress of the human soul towards perfection and happiness, is a delightful contemplation, and worthy of being encouraged. Those that have now their lot in the region of darkness, if they conduct themselves right, shall be transformed hereafter into angels of light. However differing now in knowledge, in privileges, and in worship, yet such as conduct themselves according to the light they have received, shall be finally raised to the knowledge and worship of the one true and living God.

All the précepts of our religion, and the practice of our Saviour, teach us liberality towards those who differ from us in religious profession. It is difficult to deliver ourselves from prejudices

that have been instilled into us from our youth, that have grown up with us, and been strengthened with our strength. If we had been educated in the principles of the Roman Catholic religion, we could not easily have divested ourselves of them, and perhaps we could not have seen their errors: and if we had been born and educated under the Mahometan faith, or in the dark ages of paganism, we most probably should have continued in their fetters: and they who are now the most bitter and illiberal against those who continue in these errors, would have been found the most obstinate and unreasonable in their attachment to them. But our Father, the Father of all mankind, for wise and good reasons, has not sent the light of divine truth on all the nations of the earth; He therefore will make gracious allowances for their situation and errors, and will determine their everlasting allotment by their works: *for in every nation he that feareth God, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.* Let us imitate our Heavenly Father, and our Lord and Master, in the liberality of our judgment, and not be harsh in our sentiments.

To the great Father of all, let songs of gratitude and praise rise from all the quarters of the universe. We worship Him who made the heavens and the earth; we worship Him who upholds all; we worship Him who is ever present; we worship that God whom angels worship, and



all the family of heaven and of earth ; we worship Him who is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the common bond and centre of union to all his rational offspring. All is His house ; He built, He preserves, and He governs all. And though we cannot see Him—for no man can see His face and live ; yet He is constantly present, and we cannot flee from Him : in heaven, in hell, on the sea, on the dry land, He is present to our hearts, and knows all our thoughts. Fear Him ; love Him ; trust in Him ; and commit yourselves and all your dearest interests to His management.

## SERMON IV.

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LUKE xxiii. 34.

*Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.*

IT is supposed that this prayer was offered up by Jesus Christ, at the time when his sufferings were at the greatest extremity. The crucifixion was in this manner: the tree, with its cross beam, was laid upon the ground; the unhappy sufferer was stretched with his limbs upon the bed of sorrow, and his hands and feet were fastened to the wood by large nails. In this situation, the cross was raised erect, and plunged into a hole fitted to receive it, whilst the sufferer had to sustain the severe shock with the whole weight of the body, hanging by the tender parts, now severely torn by the nails driven into them. It was at this very time, it is supposed, that Jesus Christ thus prayed—*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.* From these words, I propose to illustrate this part of the character and divine temper of Jesus Christ, by the consideration of the injuries he received, and the readiness with which he forgave his enemies; and this receives great beauty likewise, from the manner in which this forgiveness is expressed.

The injuries which he received, are greatly aggravated by a number of circumstances, with which they were accompanied. For this cruel treatment, it may be observed, in the first place, he had given no provocation : they persecuted him without cause ; for they themselves could assign no plausible reason for the part they were acting. This is a very singular case ; in this respect it distinguishes the injustice of this act from all others. He was no enemy to the existing government, and he took no concern in the political questions that then agitated Judea. His enemies tried to draw him into a snare of this kind, when they put the question to him, whether it was lawful to give tribute to Cæsar. We see the wisdom by which he evaded this snare : *Shew me a penny, &c.* Neither was he guilty of any of those vices which render men odious to society ; nor was he a murderer, a traitor, an oppressor of the poor, or guilty of any fraud. Whilst he spoke as never man spoke, yet in his manners we see all the simplicity and innocence of a child. It is sufficient to refer to the only charge they could prefer against him. They called him a wine-bibber, because he lived a common life, and was the friend of publicans and sinners. This he certainly was, but not in the sense they meant ; not as encouraging men in sin, but in leading them to repentance. Sometimes they persecute him for calling God his Father, and for his say-

ing he came from God ; and yet he was daily working the works of God, manifesting his power, his goodness, and love. Finding nothing to allege against him that might affect his life, they suborn false witnesses : and what do they produce ? *Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up again.* Nothing proves more clearly the purity and excellency of his character, than the shifts to which his enemies had recourse to take away his life. And upon this part, I would remark, as a proof of the conduct of Providence in managing this cause, his enemies were permitted to take away his life ; God delivered up his ever-blessed Son to the rage and cruelty of men ; they were permitted to murder him without a cause : yet they were not permitted to invent any thing which might affect his moral character. And this appears the more extraordinary, when we consider the corrupted state of the Jewish people at that time. Why could they find none to come forward and swear, that he had been guilty of some horrid or detestable crime ? Thus, by the overruling hand of God, his moral character was preserved spotless, and without stain. Another circumstance, equally unaccountable, and to which, likewise, we shall not in this respect be able to find a parallel, is, that their malice and rage were permitted to be carried to the utmost extremity. In common cases, it is seldom or never, that we find men of

rank and character, attending common executions. These are sights reserved for the base, the profligate, and men of harsh and unfeeling hearts. But at the foot of the cross, and to be the spectators and witnesses of the sufferings of Jesus Christ, we find priests and rulers, and the captain of the temple, not only attending, but taking an active part in the horrid scene, not only spectators, but real actors. Again, in common cases, when once the criminal is delivered over to the executioner, to suffer the sentence of the law, every heart relents; whatever wish they might have for punishment, the spectators feel pity and compassion, and if it were in their power, they would deliver the criminal. But the Jews and their rulers continued their persecutions to the last moment, adding insults and bitter reproaches to sufferings, and mocking the adorable Jesus in every manner, offering him vinegar to drink; exclaiming, *He saved others, himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God.* These insults were continued to the very last. And when all was over, after he had supported his sufferings with the greatest dignity, and exemplified the greatest patience and divine goodness in the treatment of his friends, his mother, his disciple,

and the penitent thief ; and after displaying the most exalted piety in the commitment of himself to his Heavenly Father :—*Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit* : and after all nature had borne testimony to his cause, there being darkness over all the earth from the sixth to the ninth hour, then the historian says,—*Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God.*

Second, The manner of his forgiveness, is a proof of his sincerity and greatness. He forgives all ; and this forgiveness was not that formal forgiveness which we often meet with in the world. Men sometimes in words express their forgiveness, when their breasts are boiling with resentment, and thirsting for revenge. But this great act is perfectly consistent with every other part of his life. The ill usage and provocations which he received from men, never soured his temper, nor put him out of humour with the world. We frequently have opportunity of seeing what effect ill treatment has upon men ; they naturally thirst for revenge, and generally embrace the first opportunity for gratifying this vindictive passion. Ill usage sometimes has compelled the patriot to abandon the cause of his country, and to take up arms against his friends and the land that gave him birth. There is in

the Roman history a celebrated instance of this in Coriolanus, one of their most virtuous citizens and patriots. He carried his resentment so far, as to repel the solicitations and prayers of his army : it required the intercession of his wife and mother, to pacify him, and to withdraw him from the enemies of his country. But how much greater is the mind of the adorable Jesus ; in his divine breast resentment was never harboured. He was despised and rejected by the Jewish nation ; they treated with scorn all his kindness, yet he never betrays the least symptom of spleen or resentment : he came to seek and to save that which was lost, and nothing could divert him from his benevolent design. And to the very close of his active life, his love, his goodness to Judea and Jerusalem, were unconquerable. He looked upon Jerusalem, and wept over it, and pronounced this tender lamentation : *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not !* May we not then believe, that this last prayer, *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do*, was the genuine effusion of his heart ? This is agreeable also to the other parts of his character, and to the sentiments which he constantly maintained. When his disciples wanted him to call down fire from

heaven on the inhabitants of a certain village of the Samaritans, which would not receive him, he rebuked them, and said, *Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of*:—when Judas came to betray him, he said, *Friend, wherefore art thou come?*—and to the multitude who came with Judas, *I sat daily with you teaching in the temple, and ye laid no hold on me*:—when Peter, in his rash zeal, cut off the ear of the High Priest's servant, Jesus said, *Put up thy sword into the sheath*. In short, we have no sentiment or fact any where in his history, in opposition to this. This, then, is that exalted character, which we must do more than admire; this is that character which all must approve; this, which we must aim at, but which we never can perfectly imitate. This presents to us human nature in the highest perfection, and tells us what man shall be in another and a more perfect world. This presents us with a most exalted duty, and the perfect example of Jesus Christ, is one of the strongest evidences of the truth of christianity, and a most amiable and beautiful representation of its excellence. It presents our religion in the most attractive and lovely form, and evinces its superiority to all other religions that were ever given to the world. The religion of Moses, contains a number of excellent moral duties. Moses was a great lawgiver, and a man eminent also as an example; but how does he



sink in comparison : we see anger getting the better of his meekness ; and we have instances of his executing the awful justice of heaven, in his punishment of Pharaoh, and the previous plagues by his authority inflicted on the land of Egypt ; in his punishment of Korah, and others. This principle, if ever there had been any doubt, would decide the claim of Mahomet to the character of a prophet of God—what was his example ? Suppose it were to be alleged, that the whole of the character of Jesus Christ is a fiction of the imagination ? We may reply, it is almost impossible to suppose, that a character so regular, so consistent, so complete in all its parts, and so unlike to every thing the world had ever seen before, should have been formed all at once, and in every part so perfect, that no room is left for improvement. And the harmony and consistency in the doctrines, the precepts, and example, so complete, that no improvement has been made in this system for nearly eighteen hundred years. And this argument would become irresistible, did not professed christians defeat its effect, by laying stress on a number of other things, irrational in themselves, and disgraceful to religion. How few christians are there, who lay that stress upon it which it deserves. The moral example of Jesus Christ, is lost and forgotten amidst a number of doctrines, tenets, and observances, which have no connection with genuine chris-

tianity. And were all professed christians to act up to his example, or to make it the rule of their conduct, this would do more to the conversion of the world, than every other means—preaching, praying, or even miracles themselves. And this part of his character, the readiness with which he forgave his enemies, is the test and evidence of the excellence of the whole. A man may be just, there is a principle within that comes forward in support of justice : he may be benevolent, and be capable of exercising the highest acts of goodness ; our feelings here in general go along with us, and meet with their encouragement and reward in the pleasing approval of our own minds ; but to forgive enemies, is the highest act of the moral character, for here our natural desires run in direct opposition. We wish and we seek to revenge unprovoked injuries. In the eyes of the world, the overlooking injuries is construed into cowardice and pusillanimity, and will be set down to the account of a low and a grovelling spirit. How great, then, must that mind have been, which could overlook all these, conquer the deep-rooted prejudices of the world, and the strongest passions of the human heart, and with the utmost fervour and sincerity pray—*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do !* We are compelled, sometimes, to forego our desires of revenge, from want of power, from the danger

accompanying the attempt; but Jesus Christ was possessed of sufficient power to counteract and defeat all the plans of his enemies: witness the power he manifested on many occasions. He could have prayed, and his Father would have given him more than twelve legions of angels; his forgiveness proceeded therefore from the purest source.

Again, his forgiveness is accompanied with another circumstance that adds greatly to its excellence; he furnishes for them the only apology that could possibly be devised—for *they know not what they do*. This is a specimen of his excellent temper on such occasions. When the disciples, overpowered with fatigue and watching, fell asleep during his agony, he extenuated their conduct, by observing, *The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak*. What master would thus have so kindly apologized for the neglect and inattention of his servants? and this, most probably, was the truth. The apostle Paul, in imitation of this conduct of his master, says, *I not that through ignorance ye did it*; and in another place, *If they had known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory*. In our treatment of men, there are a great number of apologies, that may be suggested for their conduct; some arising from their own nature and condition, and others from the natural irritability of some tempers, which it is very dif-

ficult to cure : the offence which we have received, may have provoked ill treatment on our part towards the offender. . If Jesus Christ could freely forgive such injuries as he received, and at the very time when he was suffering so severely under them, what reason have we to exercise this temper, knowing our own weakness and imperfections? He is therefore saying to us, *I have given you an example that ye should tread in my steps. By this shall all men know that ye are his disciples*, by finding the same mind and temper in you, which was so excellently manifested in Jesus Christ. The duty is difficult ; it is the highest exercise of virtue, the greatest trial of our temper and character ; but it is what all men must approve.

This part of our Lord's character, is a very fit subject for our meditation ; it is a subject that never can be sufficiently recommended ; and the more we study it, the more must we admire its excellence, the more must we love him who has given to us this most perfect example. It is one of those acts of religion, in which we never can be mistaken. There are a number of doctrines very much insisted upon, which we are at a loss how to apply to practice ; but the example of Christ is plain, of the highest importance, and the imitating of it is the highest ornament of our nature. To be possessed of the same mind and temper, to walk as Christ did, and to become followers

of him, all may comprehend. Were this one of the chief doctrines presented to the christian, it would be more consistent with the simplicity of the christian character, and could not fail to produce a good effect. And were this the subject chiefly presented to strangers, it would be easily understood, and no point could be gained of greater importance, than to prevail upon them to imitate the life and conduct of Jesus Christ ; to imitate him in his divine goodness, to copy after him in his treatment of his friends and of his enemies. What must be the blessed effect to men themselves, to the society of which they are members, and to the world at large ? Many other doctrines generate strife ; this begets concord, peace, and love. Can we conceive a scene more affecting, and of deeper interest, than to have witnessed the behaviour of the Saviour of the world in this last hour, and to have heard this prayer, and especially when we consider the manner in which it must have been uttered, when delivered by him who spake as never man spake ? Deeply hardened must those hearts have been, who after this could continue to persecute and insult the Saviour of the world. Were we to fix upon any one mark, as the most certain characteristic of the disciples of Jesus Christ, this must be the character. We have given to us by our Saviour himself, an account of those principles by which the general

judgment shall be regulated, in Matth. xxv. 31—46. *For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat ; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink ; I was a stranger, and ye took me in ; naked, and ye clothed me ; I was sick, and ye visited me ; I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.* The benevolent temper is here given as the strongest mark of belonging to Christ. This temper is beautiful and praiseworthy. But it is certainly not difficult to assume that men may do all these things from base views, and from the most interested motives ; but it is not easy to forgive injuries, and with that perfection and sincerity with which Christ forgave his enemies. This is the highest point of moral excellence, and we see what great stress our Saviour lays upon it ; it is the condition on which we are to expect forgiveness. *If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father which is in heaven, forgive your trespasses.* We are even called upon to love our enemies. Further, we receive instruction from considering the time ; it was in the article of death. This was the heavenly temper with which he retired from the world. And this is that temper fittest for us to part with the society of man, and the fittest to enter those blessed mansions, where no bad temper can dwell, and to associate with those bene-

volent and pure spirits, whose sole exercise and labour, is love. Let us cultivate, then, this temper, whilst here, in our intercourse with the world, and make it habitual, for we are not to expect that the change is to pass on us like a charm. For in the same state of mind in which we leave the world, we shall for ever remain. *He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he that is filthy, let him be filthy still; and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still; and he that is holy, let him be holy still.* And we may add, he that is benevolent, let him remain so still.

## SERMON V.

I CORINTHIANS, xv. 51.

*Behold, I shew you a mystery ; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed.*

**THERE** are a great number of things, which will add to the happiness of the Righteous, and which there is the greatest probability that good men will enjoy, in the future and eternal world.

1st, The change by death, will enlarge and strengthen our views, and will introduce us to a more perfect and extensive knowledge of the works of the Creator. Such knowledge is here given to us through his works ; and in the future world, such knowledge will be enlarged and perfected, for the exaltation of our happiness. In our present state we are surrounded with the immensity of God's works, but placed at a distance immeasurable. We see that there are such works, but we can add little more. But to see these more perfectly, to be made acquainted with their magnitude, with their connection, with the universe at large ; to know their inhabitants, their powers and faculties, their lives and occupations ; and that they are our fellow-worshippers, serving the same God whom we serve ; that



they are a part of God's great family, and equally the objects of his paternal care, what boundless source for exercise and enjoyment ! We shall find, then, how true is the assurance of our Lord and Master, that in his Father's house there are many mansions. To this, we may add, that the powers of our mind will be rendered stronger and brighter, to comprehend more fully and perfectly the works of the Creator : these two must go together, to render our views and our attainments more complete. We may suppose a scene of greater glory, presented to us in the present life, and with the present state of our faculties ; but this would be of no service to our edification, without our powers of vision were strengthened and enlarged. Were the light of the sun to be increased ten or a hundred fold, it would be of no service to us, whilst our powers of vision remain unchanged : it would only serve to dazzle and perplex us. It would be the same to have our evidences for a future state, enlarged and perfected, whilst our minds cannot take them in. They would serve only to darken and perplex us, and to disqualify us for our present enjoyments, when we are not capable of looking upon these evidences. The disciples, upon the mount of transfiguration, were in a similar state, when the bright scene of the heavenly inhabitants was exhibited. They were afraid : they knew not what to say ; till at last they came forward with,

*It is good for us to be here.* And such representation as this, should be a sufficient answer to all those who complain of the want of more and clearer evidence. They know not what they ask ; and if they believe not Moses and the prophets, neither would they be persuaded, though one should come from the dead.

But when, with increased powers and faculties, a brighter and more enlarged scene shall be presented to us, we shall be admitted to see and know more of the divine operations, and see more links in that endless chain, ascending from the least beginning of life, higher and higher in the scale of the rational nature, stretching upward to the highest degree of created intelligence, but never capable of reaching Him, who is from everlasting to everlasting. Standing in this exalted station, how inexpressibly glorious, to see the Father of all, as far as our improved nature can see Him, preparing countless millions of rational creatures for the enjoyment of that happiness adapted to their nature ! And how delightful to behold Him employing death as his messenger, to remove mankind to a more perfect life, in his immortal habitation, and employing a state of suffering to prepare men for the highest enjoyments, and causing the dark vale of death to open to them a passage to everlasting light.

2d, It may be said, that we can form no idea of that future state ; nor is this to be expected. Man; in his first state of existence, in the womb, is in a state of great imperfection. Were he endowed with any recollection of that state, he would remember that he could then form no idea of that more perfect life, upon which he was to enter, when he was to come forth into this world. He could form no conception what sight is, or hearing, or the other senses ; far less what memory or judgment is, or the other powers and faculties of the mind. In his narrow lodging, he could not tell what motion is, or how he could remove from one place to another ; and therefore how wonderful would it appear, that in this new condition of life upon which he was to enter, he should be possessed of powers to travel to great distances. And he could form to himself no picture of that wide world, on which he was about to come forth, to become a member, and to act such a conspicuous part. He could not understand what society is, and conversation, and how the inhabitants could communicate with one another ; and consequently, he must be equally ignorant of the wonderful power of speech, and how the inhabitants could converse with one another, when at the greatest distance, by the invention of writing. This to him must appear to be fully as unaccountable, as if we should suppose, that

in the future world, the blessed inhabitants shall have the power of understanding one another's thoughts at the greatest distance, and in this manner to hold conversation together. Man, in the state of the womb, could form no understanding of the various creatures with which this earth is stocked ; nor what the sun and moon and stars are ; the wonderful revolutions of the heavens, and how much they contribute to the blessings of this earth. He must be equally ignorant of all the virtues and benevolent affections, which contribute so much to the dignity, to the ornament, and the happiness of man.—Such is man in his first state, in the rudiments of his existence. And may we not believe, that his next advance in the scale of existence, may as far surpass the present, as the present surpasses that his first state in the womb ; and that his future state, his perfect state, in extent, in knowledge, in the improvement of his powers and faculties, may exceed every thing that we can conceive whilst here ? The natural birth sent forth man into the present state ; and death, which delivers him from the prison of the world, will have the effect of expanding and perfecting his powers and faculties, and presenting to him a wonderful display of the power, wisdom, goodness, and benevolence of the Creator.

3d, The objection raised by the unbeliever, is, that we cannot tell what we shall be : so that

if we had never seen any thing of man but his condition in the womb, we should argue, that it is improbable this imperfect, weak and helpless being, shall ever arrive to the knowledge of God ; that he shall, in the future part of his existence, ever be endowed with the capacity of reasoning, of planning, and directing this inferior world ; of measuring the paths of the sun, the moon, and of foretelling all their appearances. What an amazing advance, then, from his first state in the womb, to the extraordinary display of his faculties, only on the earth. What bounds then can we set to his improvement, when he is translated by death to greater displays of the works of the Creator, and with all his powers and faculties purified, perfected, and strengthened. In this state, we have some knowledge of our Creator, of his providence, and perfections. We have powers of the highest importance, and for the existence of which we cannot account, from our present state. These have an intimate relation to the future world.

The different states of men, have a close connection with one another : the state in the womb, prepares for our state in this world ; and our present state is a state of preparation for that more perfect state, which awaits us in the eternal world. The state in the womb is limited to nearly a determinate number of days : the present state is a period of uncertainty ; in general,

its duration extends to three or fourscore years, a few cases excepted, which extend considerably beyond this period : but the duration of the future world is everlasting. If this, then, be the case, death will not be the termination of our existence, but the beginning of a more perfect life, and to good men, the entrance upon an endless state of bliss : and upon this principle, there can be no cessation of our existence, and no such thing as death, properly so called ; but the different stages of our life rise higher and higher, and good men ascend nearer and nearer to the fountain of life, and perfection, and happiness. Such are the ravishing prospects reserved for the faithful disciples of Christ, when the earthly house of this tabernacle is dissolved. These prospects give to us the most gratifying and satisfactory account of the state of man, whilst here. Why has the infinitely good Creator implanted in man the most ardent desire for the continuance of his existence ? Such wishes serve only to distress us, if there be nothing beyond the present state ; but if another world, all is well : and these passionate desires point out to us the dignity of our nature, and tell us that we belong to God's everlasting family.

4th, The change by death will introduce us to a more perfect sight of the goodness of the Creator. Here we are in a mixed state ; misery is blended with happiness : but after passing

the gate of death, good men will be released from all pain and misery, from all apprehensions, and will be for ever with the Lord. We know not what we shall be ; but we shall be made like unto Him, for we shall see Him as he is. The apostle speaks with rapture of this improved state, and makes some reference to some of its constituent parts. In a burst of the most sublime eloquence, he proclaims to all the disciples of Christ, *It is sown in corruption ; it is raised in incorruption : it is sown in dishonour ; it is raised in glory : it is sown in weakness ; it is raised in power : it is sown a natural body ; it is raised a spiritual body. Behold, I shew you a mystery ; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump : for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality, &c. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.*

We may form some notion of that change, from the change which passed on our Saviour by his resurrection. Our Saviour's body passed through a great change by death : he seemed after that to have a spiritual body. When

present with his disciples, and conversing with them on subjects, on which none could converse but himself, yet they knew him not. This situation of the disciples, we might ascribe to their surprise, not knowing that their Lord was risen from the dead, did we not meet with other instances in confirmation, that some extraordinary change had passed upon his body. He came in to the disciples *when the door was shut* ; and it is said, when he departed, that *he vanished out of their sight*. This refers to some extraordinary mode of retirement. Of the same nature, was his appearance to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias ; they knew not their master : and we see the change more evidently, when he was taken up to heaven, and a cloud received him out of their sight. This ascension implies a power and activity, which belongs not to our bodies. And yet we are assured that it was actually his body, and the same body which was crucified, for he invited his disciples to handle him, and feel ; *for (said he) a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have*. These changes in our Lord's body, intimate to us the changes which our bodies shall undergo by death.

5th, By this great change, our bodies will certainly become more active, to be fitted for their highly improved nature, and to enjoy a more extended survey and knowledge of the works of the Almighty. Our Lord ascended up into hea-



ven, not by the assistance of angels, but by the activity of his improved body. If we should suppose that he was carried by angels, this brings us nearly to the same instruction ; for it tells us that there are beings of transcendant powers ; and such may men become, when they are translated to the heavenly mansions.

Another property that we may reasonably expect in the improved nature of good men, is, that they shall be capable of knowing what is transacted in distant places. It is not necessary to state the extent of that distance : it is a perfection belonging to the Supreme alone, to know and to be present everywhere ; but limited natures may be permitted to know such things, as may increase their happiness. We are fearfully and wonderfully made, and we can by no means account for the different operations either of body or mind. The senses are wonderful : sight is a faculty which we cannot tell how it is effected. How much must it raise our admiration and delight, also to know, that we are capable of contemplating objects at the greatest distance, with considerable accuracy, and to see, not in one point only, but all around, upwards, downwards, in all directions. How much does this wonderful faculty contribute to the usefulness and enjoyment of life ; and in what a miserable situation should we be placed, if we were to be deprived of this most excellent sense, and the

inlet to the greatest enjoyment. But though we partake of it in such an extensive measure, yet we can by no means account for its operation. And light, by which we can make use of this faculty, is equally unaccountable and wonderful. The other senses are of great use to us, and we find the same difficulty in accounting for them. What then shall we say of the powers of the mind—reason and understanding, memory, and imagination? These, besides the wonder they excite, introduce us to another class of beings, and their operations. They point out to us beings with whom we are in some measure acquainted, and greatly interested, but whom we cannot fully comprehend with any of our senses, nor account for their operations, and whom we cannot see nor handle. We cannot tell where thought resides, and yet we are astonished at its powers. Thought is not confined to place, nor limited to time : our thoughts rise from the present place, to places distant and remote : they fly throughout the wide expanse of creation—from earth to heaven. Thought is not limited, in its operations, to the creature ; it rises to the Creator, and tries to embrace the great God himself. Now, if creatures so limited in their nature, are capable of such powers, what may be the powers and capacities of more perfect intelligence? If the powers of man are so great, what must be the powers of more perfect beings? When comparing our

limited powers, with the powers of angels, we can set no bounds to their action. And if the powers of man in this lower world, do so much excite our wonder and delight, what shall be our powers, when translated to a more perfect state, after the great change has passed upon us.

In reflecting and meditating on the precise situation of man, we may conceive many improvements of which human nature is capable: For instance, if it were proper, we might be rendered capable of being transported, and with the greatest velocity, to different parts of the universe, and to take in a wider range of the works of the Almighty. This might not be suitable in our present state, or such a power would not answer the end for which we are sent here. Again, we might possess the power of knowing one another's thoughts: this would not be convenient or proper for us here; it would not add to the enjoyment of society, to be capable of knowing the thoughts and intentions of the heart of our neighbour, and to know every thing passing there. This can suit only those of a perfect nature, and such may be laid open without any apprehension or fear. The prospect of this perfect change, is a subject of comfort and joy. We know not at present what we shall be. This prospect is a strong motive to diligence, to embrace that exhortation in the conclusion of the chapter from which our text is taken, *Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye*

*steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.* What an enlarged prospect of happiness ! a wide scene for our improvement. The more we know of the works of the Creator, the more wonderful. We may not be able to comprehend what man shall be, when this great change takes place : we know neither its nature nor limits. A number of objects that fall within our observation, in the heavens, we cannot understand. Some of the planets have accompaniments that surpass our understanding. Our moon, which accompanies our earth, is wonderful, useful, and beautiful ; but some of the other planets have four, and others seven attendants ; and some a splendid ring : and they may be inhabited by rational beings far surpassing man.

In the improved state of the blessed company, they may be possessed of the power of knowing one another's thoughts. We cannot tell how this can be effected ; but this is no objection to that improvement : for if we allow that new powers and faculties shall be given to them, all these are within the power of the Creator. Such powers are necessary to perfect their enjoyment, in that more extensive scene in which they will be placed. Had good men such enlarged powers conferred upon them, they would fit them for keeping up communication with other worlds or globes, to which their knowledge may be extended. Our

present faculties give us a very limited knowledge of only a small part of our globe. Were we to have an intercourse with the other planets in this system, new powers would be necessary ; and if these boundaries were to be extended to the stars, further enlargement would be requisite. We can form some idea of this power of reading one another's thoughts, from what we know of our Saviour's powers. He was in possession of this power before his resurrection : this was made to appear by his speaking to the thoughts of those with whom he was conversing, as if well acquainted with the subject of their meditations. *Jesus knew all men, and he knew what was in man. When Jesus knew in himself that his disciples murmured. Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him.* And as an evidence of his knowing things at a distance, is the history of his curing the nobleman's son. Jesus, on the application of the father, saith, *go thy way, thy son liveth.* And upon enquiry, it was found, that, *at that very hour, his son began to amend.* May we not then believe, that in the region of bliss, the sincere followers of Jesus, shall be possessed of similar powers, for the promise is, *that they shall be like him, for they shall see him as he is.* In the present state, it would be hurtful and distressing for us, to penetrate into the thoughts of our neighbours, and it would add nothing to our

**happiness. But among perfect creatures, it will be a source of satisfaction and happiness, to know the hearts and wishes of perfect and pure creatures, all beaming with love and good will to all the rational creatures of God, and reflecting back the same transports of joy and blessing all around ; no spark of envy, of jealousy, or hatred. Such tempers constitute heaven.**

**There the amiable affections will be carried to the highest degree of perfection, benevolence, and the purest love. All the virtues and affections, which are the marks of an imperfect state, such as pity, compassion, mercy, forgiveness, and pardon of offences, will find no room for their exercise. There the company shall be free from all pain, from all sufferings, and what is more, from every bad wish and passion, and every thing which tortures and distresses the mind. Our bodies and our minds shall be durable, shall be perfect, and no death can enter to cause a cruel separation ; and all tears shall be wiped away from our eyes.**

**6th, Here also we shall be united again with all our virtuous friends. Death we regard as an evil, in removing us from our friends, and enjoyments in this world, from those, long endeared to us by the ties of the best affections and esteem. But on the other hand, it reunites us with those who have gone before us ; and those who are advanced in life, have many of their best friends**

now in heaven ; and those that are left behind, will follow in constant succession ; and however great that number may be, they will rapidly decline, till all that we have left shall be united to us in those happy mansions, where no future separation shall take place, and virtuous friends shall never part more ; where neither pain, nor disease, nor old age, shall invade our frame, but all the inhabitants shall flourish in immortal youth. And death will not only introduce us to the company of those we loved, our departed friends and acquaintances, but to good men of all ages, of all nations, and religions, to make up that company which no man can number. Death will introduce us into a nearer acquaintance with our Maker, and we shall enjoy more of the Divine presence, of God's favour and protection. Death, then, is not an evil ; it is the termination of all evils, and the beginning of all good. Providence allows us to mourn for the loss of virtuous friends, but sets this limit to mourning, that we sorrow not as those without hope. Death is an event determined by the wise Disposer of all things : it is prepared for us by our Lord and Master, who is gone before to prepare mansions for all his faithful servants.

Give to us, O God ! those clear views of those blessed mansions, that we may rejoice when we are called upon to follow those, *who through faith and patience are now inheriting the promises !*

## SERMON VI.

PSALM, xxxix. 9.

*I was dumb, I opened not my mouth ; because  
thou didst it.*

THE ways of God are so far removed above our ways, that in many cases, it may be said, that what appears wise or proper in the eyes of men, may be extreme folly in the sight of God. Were a tender hearted and good man left to the direction of human affairs, and endowed with no more knowledge than the bulk of men now are, he would frequently think it cruel and severe to execute the decrees of Providence : such, for instance, as to take away from the earth and society, a good man, in the midst of acts of beneficence ; to carry off an only child, from the embraces of pious and virtuous parents ; or to remove from the head of a numerous and dependent family, a parent, on whose care and industry, his family entirely depended. But all these cases, may be to answer wise and even good purposes, though we may not be able to see and comprehend the reasons for such dispensations ; and, indeed, there may be good reasons why such things should not, at such times, be



made known to us. Some good people may be withdrawn, chiefly for their own happiness, to preserve them from misfortunes evidently coming upon them, and to preserve them also from all further temptations and offences. Some may be taken away, in a great measure, for the good and improvement of those that are left behind. Some parents, by their conduct, may be the ruin of their children, by foolish indulgence on the one hand, and on the other, by setting before them a bad example.

Afflictions spring not from the dust ; they are the appointments of our Heavenly Father, and to these all men are liable. The next question is, how then are they to be received, and how are we to conduct ourselves under them ? In religious treatises, and in books of morality, we find various directions, and these directions supported by various arguments : the rule given in the text is short, and the reason also is short, but very comprehensive ; it is given as the practice of the psalmist, and delivered in his address and appeal to God. And it will lead us in the following discourse, to endeavour to shew from the psalmist's example, how afflictions are to be borne ; what we are to understand by being dumb, which will comprise in it the duty of resignation and submissive silence to God's will.

1st, Resignation, in general, means a perfect acquiescence in the dispensations of Providence.

The psalmist expresses this in the beginning of the psalm, by saying that he maintained such a command over himself, over his tongue, that he would not utter a word either good or bad, afraid lest, if he should give way, he might be in danger of offending. *I held my peace, even from good.* He would not offer to break silence, in defence of himself, and in appeal to the Almighty, and be led to murmur or complain. These expressions, under the earnestness of duty, may be understood with considerable restrictions. We are not to understand the psalmist as if he had said, that he was altogether insensible to what God had done ; or that his mind was brought to that unfeeling state, that state of insensibility and indifference, to which some of the philosophers endeavoured to reduce themselves, and to bring their disciples. Their pretensions were to root out the passions, and to render men insensible either to the pains or pleasures of life. It is a difficult task to conquer the voice of nature ; and what good man does not feel when God afflicts him in these tender parts ; when he takes from him his best comfort, his truest friend, the hope and stay of his life. Is there a good man, who does not feel, and in some way express his grief ? We cannot esteem a man of such a nature ; and if decent sorrow be not expressed on such occasions, we have reason to ascribe it to insensibility, to want of natural affection, to

absurd notions of duty, or to some cause that no reasonable man can approve. Grief and sorrow, therefore, when kept within due bounds, seem not only to be allowed, but even in some measure approved of: religion does not forbid them; on the contrary, it indulges them in a reasonable degree. The author of our divine religion, never directs us to any conduct inconsistent and absurd. We are allowed to be sensible to joys and sorrows, but to keep these feelings within proper bounds. We are allowed to mourn with those that mourn, and to join with those that rejoice. Jesus joined with the mourners at the house of Lazarus: he was moved with compassion at the desolate state of the widow of Nain, when she was deprived of her only son: he wept at the grave of Lazarus, and testified his love for that respectable family, by raising Lazarus from the grave. He never forbids mourning to his distressed disciples, provided it be restrained by duty, and checked by the principles of the gospel. We are to mourn as those who have hope, and as those especially who believe, that they who sleep in Jesus, God will bring with him. They who believe in the principles of the gospel, have many things to reflect upon, which will have a tendency to assuage rising grief, and to yield comfort, in the loss of friends. They have the satisfaction to believe, that their virtuous friends are in the regions of happiness; that they shall

meet with them again ; and that their meeting shall be in a state of perfection ; they have the satisfaction to believe, that the grave shall be compelled to yield up their mortal parts ; and that those who are now sown in corruption, shall be raised in incorruption. Without such principles as these, human nature would be a dull and lifeless state ; and this would be the case, were we to root out all the passions. Passions of themselves are necessary, and they are intended to answer some wise and good purposes, under the moral administration of God. Though sometimes they lead men astray, yet on other occasions they effect what neither reason nor arguments can produce. The parental affections have a powerful effect in the heart of a mother, and cause her to devote her whole care and life to watch over her dear infant : she can undergo sleepless and painful nights, to nurse her darling child : she sacrifices rest, and pleasure, and all enjoyments, to make it easy ; no sense of duty, no admonition, could effect any thing so completely, as that affection so deeply implanted in her breast, by the great Author of our being. Such appointments are the strongest marks of the never-ceasing care of a Providence infinitely wise and good, directing all things for the best. This is not the wisdom of a governor, but the kind wisdom of a parent, consulting in the best manner the happiness of his child. The

passions are a beautiful part of our nature. What dull and inanimate beings should we be, were there no passions to quicken our exertions? We have examples of good men conquering, in a great measure, the strength of their passions, or giving to them a proper direction. David, on one occasion, on the death of Absalom, seems to have been for some time inconsolable. When he received the account of his being slain, though at that very time he fell in the attempt to dethrone his father, and to get possession of his kingdom, and perhaps also to take away his life, yet the parental feelings were not conquered, being planted deep in his breast by the great author of nature: he breaks forth in an agony of grief, *O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!* We cannot condemn David, in this burst of passion: much rather should we be disposed to censure him, had he testified any joy on such an occasion. Joab, his general, afterwards reproved David for his partiality: nor can we blame him. David felt as a father; Joab as a politician. On another occasion, he conducts himself with more fortitude; we see in one part, all the father, and his attachment; and afterwards we equally approve and admire his fortitude and his firm and manly resignation to the order of Providence. When the child which he had by Bathsheba was lying

sick unto death, David fasted, and lay all night upon the earth : as soon as he learnt the death of the child, he arose from the earth, and washed and anointed himself, and changed his apparel, and went into the house of the Lord, and worshipped, and afterwards did eat bread in his own house ; assigning the following most excellent reason for his behaviour : *while the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept ; for I said, who can tell whether God will be gracious to me, that the child may live ? But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast ? Can I bring him back again ? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.* The case seems then to be this : religion allows sorrow and mourning ; but then this sorrow is to be regulated and restrained by duty. But religion absolutely condemns all mourning or repining at the providence of God : here we are to be dumb, and not to open our mouth. It may also not be improper here to observe, that we are, if possible, to keep from all such reflections, as may be akin to murmuring.

People, on the loss of friends, are apt sometimes to give way to a number of vain reflections ; such as, the loss might have been prevented, if I had taken such and such steps ; if they had been as careful and attentive as they ought, and might have been. To such reflections there can be no end ; and if people give way to them, there is no cure. If we were to see every thing long

before it happens, and all its different chances, we certainly might prevent many evils ; but darkness is our lot and our inheritance here : we cannot foresee the consequences of the most trifling action that we do. If a man perishes by sea, to be sure if his friends had foreseen that, they never would have suffered him to have gone such a voyage : very true ! If another perishes by land, this also, we think, might have been prevented with equal ease. But the truth is, we are ignorant, and it is the law of our appointment here below, that this must be our condition. Our only care ought to be, not to offend our God ; to do our duty, and to leave all events to the wisdom and providence of God ; for otherwise, the very steps that we may be taking to prevent an accident, may be leading to one much greater.

But 2d, Another branch of resignation, which we shall just mention, is, to try not barely to manifest our resignation by a silent submission to God's will and disposal, but also to learn to approve. This we may think hard, considering what short-sighted and imperfect creatures we are. Could we see all the ends and designs of God's dispensations ; could we see that every thing was leading, in its consequences, to good ; and that such things as may now appear to us unjust, are perfectly holy and upright ; and that others, which to us might appear afflicting and cruel, are meant for good upon the whole ; I

firmly believe we should have the greatest reason to approve of every thing that happens under his wise and perfect administration. With the knowledge, I say, that we now have, it is impossible for us to see those reasons : the only thing, therefore, that we have to do, is this ; we know that it is done by a Being every way perfect in justice, in holiness, in goodness, and in truth, and therefore we may rest assured that it is all for the best. Our friends are taken from us ; this we look upon as a very great evil. Perhaps this affliction may be aggravated by some very bitter circumstances ; such as, they were our chief supporters, our best advisers ; they had our interests constantly at heart ; and in being deprived of such, we see nothing in this world but emptiness and misery. Allowing all this to be true, suppose God has seen this to be the only means to make us fix our hearts and trust in him, and to live accordingly ; is not this, then, directing those things which at the first view seemed to be our misery, to be our greatest good ; that is, it will end such on the whole ? Hence, then, our duty on this point, is to learn to approve of and adore all such appointments, and to rejoice that we are ever with our God. It is being dumb in this sense, that we are to understand the psalmist. It is this submissive silence that we now propose further to consider, with some of the uses and improvements to be made of such afflicting dispensations,



We sometimes meet with cases and dispensations, that to our short sight may appear ungracious and unkind. Comparing them with cases of others, of a more fortunate lot in this world, we cannot see the particular reasons why we should be singled out, and why a cup so bitter should be mingled for us. And there are also often particular circumstances that help to make the stroke still heavier, and to us the more unaccountable, as coming from an infinitely good God. What then are we to do in such a situation? To complain, is undutiful, and in many cases accounted impious and wicked; to mend ourselves, alas! we have it not in our power, and nothing remains for us but to submit. How then are we to reconcile this submission to reason? The psalmist's reason is the shortest possible—*because thou didst it.*

1st, God has an absolute power over us. He gives us every thing that we now enjoy; and he has certainly a right to recal his gifts when, and where, and under what circumstances he pleases. We get indeed every thing from Him, on this express condition, that we must part with it when he pleases to call. He gives to us nothing that he promises as a perpetuity, a continued possession. Now if we are to part with some of the most valuable gifts, and which to us are always the dearest, can we devise a better method to part with them, than that very one to which we

are subjected by the providence of God? We could wish, very likely, to have some kind of warning, to prepare ourselves for yielding up our pleasures, and to be less taken by surprise. And yet, when we reflect, this is perhaps the very worst of all methods for afflicting us. Having constantly before our eyes our dear friends, whom we know we must give up on a certain fixed day, of which God had kindly forewarned us, would not this be the most miserable of all situations? The nearer that day approached, our distress would more and more increase; and the more valuable these friendships were, the more pungent would be our grief. Could we consider this as a situation more eligible than our present situation? Behold, then, an eminent instance of the wisdom and goodness of God, in wisely concealing from us the day of our own death, and the day of the death of our friends, that we might be in a fitter condition to enjoy the company and friendship of one another, whilst we are permitted to continue together in the present state! But perhaps we could then wish to be indulged with the knowledge of the nature and place of our death and theirs; and also to have a choice in some of these things, particularly to have it in our power to choose a quick or a slow death, and likewise the mode in which our death shall be effected. And yet, I believe, if this were put into our power, we should be

utterly at a loss what to choose or determine—a sudden or a lingering death ; to witness the last hour of the life of our friends, to hear their last commands, and their last prayers to God ; or to be removed from their presence—the more we consider and meditate upon such things, the greater reason we have to bless God, who has not left such things to our determination, but takes our most interesting affairs into his own management, and gives to us what he knows to be the most proper. He consults not our wishes ; therefore our duty and our interest should be, to imitate the prayer of Jesus Christ, *not our will, but thine be done*. It is kind that he gives us not our choice, for we know not what is good for us. If these matters were left to us, it is most probable we never could determine to our own satisfaction, and in most cases we should choose amiss.

We are to take this always along with us in judging of such things, that there is something in the removal of such pleasures from us, to be considered, besides the bare depriving us of the satisfaction which we receive from their company and conversation. Were the only thing proper to be consulted in such cases, how this deprivation might be effected with the least shock to our feelings ; no doubt infinite wisdom could devise a way to bring this about, without giving us any more pain in taking them away, than

when he bestowed them upon us. He could, if it answered the designs of his government, make death a pleasure, and bring about our removal with the same joy and satisfaction which we commonly feel when we are going upon a pleasurable expedition to a country on which we have set our heart, and to see friends, the dearest to us, now settled in that land of inexpressible delight. But to awaken in us a due sense of ourselves, to stir up our feelings to our highest interests, and to withdraw our desires from things hurtful and ruinous, may be one of the principal reasons for God's taking from us the blessings which he gave. God has always some wise design, in all his dispensations, either when he confers happiness, or inflicts pains. If a stroke, then, is sometimes severe, we are not to consider the severity as merely accidental, and as it were, the effect of chance : severity may be the principal intention in the dispensation ; and the depriving us of the blessing, only secondary, the means by which this severity is to be effected. We must own that severity is often necessary to enforce attention and instruction : other methods may often prove ineffectual, and hence the necessity and propriety of applying to this. We are then by no means proper judges concerning our afflictions, either with regard to the manner, the measure, or the duration. Hence we ought to be silent. One thing we are to remember,

that making death painful and unwelcome, is the only plan to keep us to our station, otherwise on every slight trouble or vexation, we should be flying from our post.

2dly, But we ought to be silent, when God afflicts, for another reason, that he is all-wise. We are sure he does nothing rashly or in vain. We are ignorant creatures, and rash ; and we are often obliged to enter blindfold on the most important undertakings, being unable to see whether we shall succeed or be unfortunate. We barely guess at the issue ; but a number of unforeseen accidents may intervene, and disappoint all our hopes, even when our prospects are the brightest. But God is liable to none of these mistakes ; and hence every thing that he ordains, must be perfectly wise : there must be some good reasons for the appointment fully known to God. This, then, is the character of afflicting dispensations—they are all wise. We cannot see the effects nor extent of any single event that happens in the moral world. The extent of a single affliction, even to a private family, may be sometimes very great and wide in its operations. A skilful workman knows the use and effect of every single part in a complicated and extensive machine, and he can exactly tell how far it is necessary, and what effect it will have upon the whole ; whereas an ignorant and unskilful spectator cannot see its

fitness nor its proper use : how penetrating and unerring, then, is the skill of the Almighty Workman, when he contemplates his own work ; every thing in his eye has its utility, every thing has its place. Known unto God are all his works.

Every dispensation then, of God, is for the best. What a different view and idea of things should we have, if we could see perfectly the various ends that every event is appointed to answer, and how it is interwoven and connected with things far remote in time and place, from itself ; it would fill our minds with wonder and delight : we should then see no room for objections, no room for murmur or complaint. The more exalted, therefore, our views and knowledge are, the more pious and submissive ought we to be. There is no murmuring, we may readily believe, among perfect spirits in heaven ; being possessed of clear and enlarged views, they see all things perfectly : nothing is wanting, nothing irregular, all harmonising and beautiful. What, then, enlarged knowledge effects in the higher world, faith is intended to accomplish among good men in the lower world ; and the more perfect our faith is, the more submissive and perfect our resignation. The persuasion that we have of the most perfect wisdom of God, is to teach us submission and resignation in all things which may appear to us harsh and unkind, and the reasons for which we cannot discover.

Let all our researches be to impress our minds with a firm persuasion of the unerring wisdom of the Divine administration, and particularly in every thing concerning man. In the higher worlds, we have the most complete evidence of the wisdom of his government, in the regularity and order of all his glorious works, in the steadfastness and duration of all their revolutions, to establish our belief in the wisdom of his government; but the free-agency of men makes it more difficult to trace the evidences of his providence, as it concerns the human race : hence to the aid of reason, we must call in the dictates and declarations of revelation, to establish our belief in God's constant interference in the management of the human race ; and that he who doth according to his will in the armies of heaven, overlooks not man, the noblest of his works here below, who was made to contemplate his works, and to rise from the knowledge of these works, to the knowledge of Him who sits at the head of this universe, and orders all things wisely and well.

3dly, We come now to a third reason for silent submission, which is, that the God who afflicts us sometimes in the most tender parts, is infinitely gracious and good. All the plans of his providence, with respect to his creatures, are meant for their good : hence, therefore, could we see into all the reasons of God's doings, we

should see cause not merely to wonder, but also to love and adore. A child, we know, cannot discern the intention of a wise and good parent, when he corrects : he often thinks him harsh and severe ; but could he have discernment to read his heart, he would see tenderness, anxiety, and love. One thing is certain, that the further he advances in knowledge and reason, the more does he approve of the part that his parent has done. He begins then to see, not only wisdom, but also love, in every stripe inflicted upon him. In like manner, could the child of God see all the designs of his heavenly father, he would see love in them all. But in considering the corrections of God, we are too apt to overlook his goodness, and to dwell the most on those parts, where we particularly feel. The most miserable man that lives, if he were to balance the miseries inflicted upon him, with the goodness he has received, would find that God, upon the whole, to him, is still good. We call the taking away of comforts, evil ; the more comforts, therefore, we receive from God, the more are we exposed to this kind of evil. Whole years of prosperity and health are overlooked, when one week of misfortune and sickness comes upon us. Years of full prosperity are not regarded as blessings, or are forgotten, when a single stroke of adversity comes. God takes from us a single friend, while at the same time he continues with us, and



preserves numbers of valuable friends, yet all these are forgotten. We feel no gratitude for these blessings; we murmur and repine, and dwell upon that friend whom we have lost. To be deprived of fortune by some cross providence, is adversity, in our estimation; then what shall we call that blessing by which the prosperity was bestowed? let not this be forgotten. We remember long the stroke that kills our comforts, but let us not forget the time we enjoyed these comforts.

But the goodness of God appears wonderful, in the manner we are prepared by Providence, for some of the most trying circumstances. Death, besides the consideration of its consequences, is a most awful situation; yet in general, the mind is prepared for the shock, before it is executed. Pain and disease lessen much the desire of life, and make death, in some cases, even desirable. Hard labour and fatigue, may sometimes also effect the same thing. To reconcile us to his dispensations, let us remember that he who afflicts us is that Great Being on whom we depend; that Being who is constantly doing us good.—Yes, it is he who sent his Son, his beloved Son, into our world, to live and die for man. By these, therefore, we may try his dispensations. Can an infinitely good God take pleasure in afflicting his creatures wantonly? Does he scatter his arrows of pain at random,

without any wisdom or design? All the ideas we can form of him from his works, from his perfections, from the experience we have of him in his dealings, and particularly from his word, stand in opposition to those impious thoughts; tell us that afflictions spring not from the dust, but that infinite wisdom and goodness regulate and direct the whole. God acts not from humour and caprice; some wise end is always in view; and the general good of his creatures is the grand principle of his wise and righteous administration. We can take in only narrow and partial views of his government; we come in to witness only the middle of some of the great plans which he is carrying forwards; we see neither the beginning, nor the progress, nor the termination. For instance, take the history of Joseph: we come in at the very period when his brethren are casting him into the pit. Here we see an action the most unnatural and cruel; we are shocked with the sight; and we are unable to reconcile it to the government of infinite wisdom and goodness; as we proceed, the plot thickens, and grows darker and darker. Joseph has to pass through many severe trials, as a slave in the house of Potiphar, and also that of a prisoner, before we begin to see any light, any appearance of wisdom in the plan. But after deliverance from the prison, he is introduced into the house of Pharaoh; he is exalted to great power and

grandeur ; and we see the great good that he is destined to bring about. By his wisdom, he provides for an approaching famine ; he becomes the saviour of Egypt, and all the surrounding lands, which comprised a large portion of the then civilized world. Thus, from this instance, we may see that if we had knowledge and understanding to take in the whole, and were God pleased to reveal to us more fully his plans, we should highly approve even of those parts that to us seem the most severe, and the most contrary to our ideas of goodness. We know well that the nearer we contemplate God's works here below, and the more narrowly we search into the several parts, the more marks of wisdom and goodness do we constantly discover. One general principle of the Divine administration, with respect to his creatures, seems to be this ; he often inflicts lesser evils, to prevent such as are much greater, and of more dreadful consequence ; and he sometimes wounds the body, with a view to improve or save the soul. There is not an affliction to which we are liable, that is more grievous or more difficult to be supported with patience and fortitude, than the loss of dear friends. But upon the principle on which we have been arguing, we may find many motives to help us to reconcile our minds to such trials. We may not be able to tell the reasons why Providence has taken them from us ; only thus far we have room

to say, that the reasons must be good. With respect to the friends we have lost, it may be to prevent much more misery to them in this world, from severe trials and afflictions, and to take them also out of the way of great dangers. The prophet argues upon this principle : *the righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart ; and merciful men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come.* Whilst we are on this side the grave, we are never secure ; and there are miseries to which we are liable that seem much worse, and much more to be lamented, than death itself. An early death is not always to be lamented : how happy would it have been for many, and for their friends also, if they had died when young : it would have prevented much misery and much infamy. But God, in his wisdom, presents us frequently with such examples, to show us the folly of blaming the wisdom or goodness of the Divine administration, when our friends are taken from us by an early death. It is therefore, or should be, an inexpressible comfort to us, that we are constantly under the direction of an all-perfect Being, and that we are not permitted in these, the most essential parts, to govern and direct ourselves. Such a principle, let us apply to our own thoughts, in order to correct our vain wishes, and to silence every murmur ; and not merely to do this, but to fill us with thankfulness

and comfort, that God is pleased to take us under the management of his infinite wisdom, and that he giveth and taketh away according as it seems good to him. Viewing God in this light, all other things are no more than the instruments he employs, to control and regulate the whole. Wicked men, war, famine, pestilence, and disease, are all his agents. He says, *hitherto shalt thou go, and no further*, and here shall all your power be staid.

Another comfort, arising from the principle of God's government, is the various ways by which he can assist and strengthen his servants, to bear up under their afflictions. We often see that people bear particular losses, and that we ourselves support greater afflictions much better than we could ever have supposed. Some afflictions, when they hang over us and are threatening to burst upon our heads, in prospect seem most awful and alarming. They threaten to crush and overpower us; but when once come, they are by no means so ruinous and destructive, as they were in appearance. Now how are we to account for this? Certainly from the gracious interpositions of God's providence. And yet it is not always seen how this gracious purpose is effected. The mind is strengthened we cannot tell how. God does not appear visibly in these works. We may say of this kind of assistance, as our Saviour said to Nicodemus, of

the Spirit and its influences, *the wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth.* At other times, effects of this kind may be more visible. Certain comforts are raised up to help to counterbalance such afflictions. More friends may appear, or old friends become more tender and affectionate. The spirits may be strengthened by better health, and thus become stronger to support the increased burden ; the mind may become not so sore, or not so feeling ; comforts or strength may arise even from other afflictions. Any general calamity threatened to our country, may reconcile us better to the loss of friends, by reflecting, that whilst resting in their beds of silence or of peace, they cannot be disturbed by the noise of war, or the sound of the trumpet ; or some other domestic affliction may draw the attention, or divert the thoughts.

But besides all these, and which is a more pleasing comfort, God can inspire the minds of his servants with more patience and fortitude, and also with a more perfect and complete resignation. When other comforts fail, God can bestow this ; for when all friends forsake, or are removed from the righteous, then God will take them up. *The eternal God, then, is their refuge, and underneath them are his everlasting arms. Thou, O God, wilt keep in perfect peace, all those whose minds are stayed on thee. Thou wilt never suffer the righteous to be moved,*

But another comfort we have under adversity, is the shortness of the afflictions of this life, to good men. This is the comfort which the apostle applies to himself: *for our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.* They may very often be very sharp and severe; and may require the utmost strength and fortitude of mind to bear up under them, even when assisted by all the consolations of religion; yet we know they must have a period. But when all is exhausted, we have the most certain assurance, that death will put an everlasting period to the miseries of the righteous. To such, then, it becomes greatly desirable. Of whatever nature our affliction be, if only we are careful to maintain a conscience void of offence, death will be a happy period. Do our sufferings arise from bodily pain? Death, by the dissolution of the mortal part, and the release of the immortal spirit, puts a final period to all such sufferings. Do they arise from poverty or want? Death puts an end to all complaints of this nature, by placing us in such a state, where we shall stand in need of nothing that this earth affords. Do our troubles arise from the persecution or slanders of men? Death puts us beyond the power of men and all that they can do. Or lastly, do our afflictions arise from the loss of dear and virtuous friends? Death unites us to them for evermore; providing we

only be careful to die in the Lord. Compared then, with eternity, how trifling is all that men can suffer here, if heaven be at last their reward !

But the grand consolation that the gospel furnishes to man, is, that there is another life. Hence we are always to mourn as those that have such exalted hopes. In this consolation, are included a number of particulars. First, it opens to us a wide and glorious connexion. The righteous are the citizens of a glorious and extensive country : they belong to the same family as angels, and all the pure and blessed spirits above ; and to them this world is nothing but a state of banishment : but this banishment they are to bear with patience and with fortitude, till such time as he who appointed them here, shall be pleased to call them home. But good men have the prospect, not only of being united to their elder brethren, to the pure and blessed angels, but also to the spirits of just men made perfect ; to all those saints, who have lived before in this world, from the days of Adam to the final consummation of all things. Then shall we see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob ; Moses, Daniel, and Job ; Christ, the mediator of the new covenant, his apostles, his martyrs, and all those who have been his sincere followers through life.

But to proceed : the gospel, for our comfort, also assures us of the resurrection of the dead. The coming of Christ to judgment, forms the



great period of the triumph of the saints. The apostle speaks of it with rapture. Paul says, *looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ ; and then he shall change our vile bodies, and make them like unto his own glorious body.* Here will be to them a day of triumph, as it is the end of all their afflictions and sufferings, and the beginning of their eternal joy. Their enemies scoffed and said, *where is the promise of his coming ? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. But, behold, he cometh in the clouds of heaven, with great power and glory ; and every eye shall see him,*

What duties, then, arise from this view of our situation? First, they call for our patient submission, and that not founded merely upon the inutility and folly of complaining, as we cannot alter or remove these appointments, but upon a more amiable and reasonable principle ; because he who afflicts, is infinitely wise and good : hence our submission should be accompanied with praise and love. Could we see the reasons that determine infinite wisdom, we should undoubtedly bless God even when he takes from us our comforts : a great number of reasons even occur to our minds, which appear good. He may take our friends from us to his everlasting happiness, and on this account we have then no reason to

murmur. And he may take them from us, because, perhaps, we either have made or would make a bad use of such comforts. We are liable to set our minds too much upon such blessings, to the neglect or hinderance of duty, and to the withdrawing of our minds from God. Hence, the depriving us of such comforts, by taking them unto himself, is another proof of his goodness; and though we may not readily bring our minds to such concession, yet it is no less a proof of his care over us, in thus forcing upon us these favours, by taking the management of our affairs into his own hands, and by thus giving to us, not what we may choose, but what God chooses and knows to be the best. We are unfit, in many cases, to choose for ourselves. In this, as in many similar cases, we may find, that though at first we may not be able to reconcile ourselves to such trials, yet after the mind becomes more cool, and we become more accessible to reason, we may be disposed to acknowledge such dispensations are good, and even be thankful to God for enforcing them upon us. Most people, who pay any attention to what passes in their own minds, will be able to recollect several instances in their own lives, where this has been their situation. Considerations of this kind, make silent submission a duty highly reasonable, and peculiarly proper for our situations.

Again, he takes from us earthly comforts, to excite our attention to comforts that are distant and heavenly. Did we find this earth perfectly agreeable in every respect, we should never look beyond it. We may see every day the fatal effects of prosperity: it begets pride, haughtiness, intemperance; then disease and remorse must follow, unless men continue satisfied with themselves, and die in their sins. If God, therefore, employ afflictions, kindly to prevent these evils, have we reason to complain? Afflictions answer many good purposes; they call our attention to ourselves, and engage us to look out for some comforts beyond the present state. Evidently this world cannot yield lasting satisfaction to man. Man's happiness is not to be measured by his earthly possessions; for we may daily see from experience, that rich men are often miserable. Nor does happiness depend on earthly honours, or power, or family, or strength, or beauty, or talents, or on any one thing that can be said to belong to this earth: but it depends upon other things more within the power and reach of man; on good principles, on the testimony of a good conscience, and on a good life. All these may be contained in what the scriptures say, that *wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace*. Good principles become the foundation of good conduct, and the nurse of good hopes. A good conscience produces much

inward satisfaction and pleasure ; and a good life makes us pleased with ourselves, renders us agreeable to the world, and produces that joy and tranquillity, that no earthly possessions can afford. And all these, men have much more in their power, than any acquirement or possession. No man can secure to himself health, or wealth, or strength, or talents, or honours ; but all men have it in their power to secure good principles, a good conscience, and a good life. Providence, in its kindness, commissions afflictions to call men's thoughts, to serious reflections ; to call them to repentance, and to think on their former ways : here, then, is the benefit of afflictions ; and they become valuable, if we listen to their instructions. Look, then, upon afflictions, as the marks of God's care and love, and by these we may understand the meaning of that maxim—*whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.*

Again ; let us never expect to be wholly exempt from troubles in this life : this is the condition of all below the sun : we cannot prevent them. It is our duty, then, and our interest, to prepare for them, that when afflictions do come, we may not be taken by surprise. Afflictions arise from different quarters, and on some occasions are brought on us by God's taking from us our comforts. Let us hold them, therefore, by that tenure, as those that have to part with them.

**Make, therefore, a good use of them, when in possession. If our comforts be the good things of life, employ them well, as the stewards of the most high God. Be ready to administer to the necessities of the poor, to feed the hungry, and to clothe the naked. If our comforts be our friends, let us live with them so as to discharge our duties to them ; if our children, by training them up as useful members of society, by giving them christian instruction, and setting before them a good example : so train them up, that our parting at death may not be everlasting ; that we may part in hope of meeting again.**

**Lastly : look on afflictions as the appointment of God, that you may see God in every dispensation of his providence, and consider his corrections as those of a wise and good parent ; and the present world, as a state of discipline, with a view to make us useful, and to direct all to our final improvement.**

## SERMON VII.\*

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MATTHEW, viii. 11.

*And I say unto you, that many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven.*

THESE words, spoken by our Lord himself, have a plain reference to a future state, here called the kingdom of heaven. And it is with pleasure, when we are deprived by death of a virtuous friend, that we direct our attention to such prospects. Here we find ease and consolation, and solid ground whereon to rest our hopes.

Here now it is that religion discovers its superior wisdom and excellence, in providing for us consolation adapted to our present situation. This assurance takes away the sting of death; it opens to us a future and better world, and leads to the following inquiries: first, to consider what views, as religious creatures, we should have of death, particularly what are the

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\* This Sermon was preached upon the death of a friend, with whom the author was most nearly and happily connected, and with whom he earnestly hopes to be reunited in the everlasting kingdom of Jesus Christ.

pleasing prospects in which it is presented by the gospel : secondly, what grounds we have for the hope of being united again to our virtuous friends in another and a better world : and lastly, what effects such a subject should have upon our practice. -

Suffer me then to lay before you the doctrines which I have just now mentioned.

And first, let us consider what views, as religious creatures, we should have of death, and particularly what are the pleasing prospects in which it is presented by the gospel.

In general, then, I would first observe, that there is no other passage to heaven, but through the gate of death. *It is appointed for all men once to die.* None were ever exempted from this universal law, except Enoch and Elijah, and these by a particular favour and dispensation of Providence. The rich and the poor pass there ; the prince and his meanest subject ; philosophers, statesmen, patriots and heroes ; and even Jesus Christ himself, the Great Exemplar, submitted to this common fate of mortals. This gate of death is the boundary between the two worlds. The passage, to be sure, is not such as we should wish it to be : it is dark, gloomy, and awful. But it is very proper it should be so ; else men, in every fit of peevishness and discontent, would be rushing through, unprepared, unsummoned. Were it a

passage strewed with flowers, this world would soon be depopulated : were it an easy and an agreeable passage, we should be deprived of some of the most powerful motives to diligence and preparation.

From this universal empire of death, we draw, however, both duty and comfort. For, if so many good men could not be exempted from this common and fixed law of mortality, we, then, can have no right to expect any dispensation in our favour. Why, then, should we repine either at our own lot, or the lot of our friends? We were born to die ; and the first step we take in life, is an advance towards death : it is a debt that we must pay to nature. Arguments, however, of this kind, command only an unpleasant duty. We must submit ; but it is a sullen submission, where we have no choice, no power to resist. But another step may open unto us some comfort. Death, then, cannot be such an evil as our imagination generally represents, else God would never have caused his chosen servants, and the very best of men, to go through this dark and horrid passage. There must be some bright prospect beyond this awful gate ; some glorious recompence and reward provided for all the faithful servants of God, where another and more glorious day will open upon them ; where the pangs and agonies of dissolution shall be forgotten ; *and all tears shall be wiped away from their eyes.*



For, in the second place, we are totally ignorant of death ; we cannot tell what it is : we see its effects, we can tell no more ; to look at it, and to consider its consequences, it appears dreadful. To be shut out from light and life ; to have no longer a share in any thing done under the sun ; to be consigned to the grave, the land of silence and darkness, and in danger of being forgotten by the world and our friends—these seem affecting considerations. And yet, in general, we have reason to believe, that they do not often disturb the repose of the dying ; for, we see, that almost every one goes through that scene, with more fortitude and with more composure, than it is possible for us to imagine, God has kindly provided some proper means to counteract these natural horrors of death. Let us enquire, then, what some of these are, that we may have an opportunity of seeing the goodness of God, in this last stage of our earthly existence, smoothing this passage, naturally so rough and tremendous to mortals.

In the first place, the relish for life is frequently destroyed, long before the final dissolution : this is effected in a variety of ways. When dear friends are taken from us, and all those who make life valuable ; when men outlive their families and acquaintance, and all the companions of their youthful and happy days, then they seem to be left alone upon the world ; and they

begin to wish for their dissolution, that they may be delivered from the weariness of the world, and that they may be reunited to all those that were formerly so dear and desirable. Again, the relish for life may be destroyed by misfortunes ; by the sad experience that we daily have of the uncertainty and unsatisfactory nature of all earthly enjoyments ; by the weight of infirmities ; by increased pains and bodily sufferings ; by the deprivation or gradual decay of our senses and faculties ; by unmerited ill usage ; and by a thousand nameless evils, which present death to us as a friend and welcome deliverer. In all deaths also brought about by disease, the strings that tie us to this world are insensibly broken, and the love of life is greatly weakened, some time before the awful period ; so that the last cord is commonly cut with no great degree of violence. Diseases destroy the relish for all enjoyments ; they render us helpless and burdensome ; and the sufferings and pains that are their common companions, greatly reduce our desire of life, and abate much of that eagerness which all men naturally feel for the world. When the strength fails, and the appetite is gone ; when the animal spirits are exhausted, and all the senses greatly injured ; when the capacity for enjoyment is destroyed, and all the avenues of pleasure shut up ; and when with all these, the body is oppressed with weariness and pain ; life

being now deprived of all its charms, we easily surrender our remaining interest in the world, and quit our last hold with but little struggle. This is almost always the case in the more violent and acute diseases. Others again are of a more flattering nature, and the horror is abated in another way. Strength here imperceptibly decaying, and hope encouraged by many easy symptoms, support both the patient, and friends, for a long while, and enable them to bear up with tolerable decency and composure, till at last either the thread is suddenly snapped, or life wastes away like the glimmering flame in the socket.

Such reflections may help to reconcile us to the wisdom and goodness of the dispensations of Providence. We dread disease as the greatest of evils, and yet, perhaps, this is the easiest method of removing us from this world. It is proper that we should have a natural dread of death; and yet, by disease, the horror of it is greatly abated; so that we meet with daily instances of mankind maintaining the most perfect composure in their last moments, much less agitated, and much less affected, than their surrounding friends. Death, then, cannot be that evil, which nature represents, and at which our hearts so much and so often shudder.

Having thus seen how God, in the common course of his providence, takes away from men

the sting of death, and prepares them for their removal, let us next contemplate the image that Revelation gives us of this interesting event, and the more pleasing prospect with which the dissolution of good men is accompanied. It is commonly represented in Scripture under the image of a SLEEP ; and a SLEEP not disturbed by the noise and tumult of the world. Under the Old Testament dispensation, when the dissolution of great or good men is mentioned, it is briefly said of them, that they *slept* with their fathers. The same image is preserved under the New Testament, and with much more beauty and propriety : as when the apostle says, *He was seen of five hundred brethren at once ; of whom the greater part remain, but some are fallen ASLEEP. Now is Christ become the firstfruits of them that SLEPT. I would not have you ignorant, concerning them which are ASLEEP. Them which SLEEP in Jesus, will God bring with him.* All these expressions intimate, that death does not destroy our existence ; that it is only a suspension of our living powers ; that all shall be again revived, *when this mortal shall put on immortality.* This image of death was employed by the apostles, not merely as an idiom or an ornament of their language, but as a principle which had the most powerful effect upon their conduct. They are never, to be sure, found unnecessarily risking their lives, or wantonly

exposing themselves, when duty did not call; but on the other hand, they avoid no danger where duty summons; and they fear no power, when the honour of their master and the interest of religion are concerned. Under the influence of this principle, from the most timid, they became the most courageous of all men, and with a noble boldness bore testimony to the truth, before *the PRINCES and RULERS of this world*. When they were commanded *not to speak; nor to teach in the name of Jesus of Nazareth*, hear their reply: *whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye*. And this reply was given in the face of the Jewish Sanhedrim, where *with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of Jesus*. Under the influence of these principles, they triumph over death: they describe it, and speak of it in themselves, not as an object of aversion and terror, but as their wish and their greatest joy; and that, not in the language of men weary of the world, but as those who were assured of a blessed immortality. Nor do we meet with any thing like the wildness of enthusiasm in their manners, but sober truth and reason, animated with christian joy. *For we know*, says Paul, *that if the earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens*. And can we meet with any thing

more eloquent and sublime, but at the same time more regular and correct, than his discourse on the resurrection, in the celebrated 15th chap. of 1 Cor. ; where, after a strain of the most beautiful reasoning, he breaks out into that animated address, *O death, where is thy sting ? O grave, where is thy victory ?* The death of the first martyr, Stephen, is a noble instance of the christian's triumph over death. Thus you see, the image that the apostles give of death, is confirmed and much adorned by their lives and practice.

But again ; the gospel teaches us, that death, to good men, is a removal to the best of company, and the most perfect society. *They shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God,* and with all good men, collected in every age, and from every dispensation, under heaven, to make up that grand company *which no man can number, of all tongues, and kindreds, and languages.*

Reflections.—1st, As the care and goodness of God are so conspicuous in this last and trying scene, we need not entertain any unreasonable horror of death. God prepares mankind in general, in some measure ; and he will be peculiarly present to comfort and strengthen good men, for their dissolution. The consciousness of having endeavoured to perform their duty, and the reflections on a well spent life, will en-

able them to look backward with pleasure ; and the prospects that the gospel presents, bid them look forward with hope ; whilst the peace of believing fills them with joy unspeakable and full of glory. To live well, is the best defence against the terrors of death ; come then what will, nothing will harm us, if we only be followers of that which is good. Without this, nothing will protect us ; *for there is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.*

2d, Such of us as have now our best friends in heaven, these most valuable treasures, are laid under strong additional obligations to use care and diligence, to labour to become partakers of their glory ; to join the same blessed company ; to be admitted again to their society and friendship ; and to mingle hearts and souls again. They are gone before, and they are waiving to us from the mansions of glory—come, follow us, *who by faith and patience are now inheriting the promises.*

3d, We see here under what pleasing views the gospel presents that, which has ever been accounted the greatest of all evils. Death is here spoiled of all his terrors. As imperfect creatures, and as guilty creatures, we cannot help looking forward with fear and apprehension to this awful period. And as being united to this earth by many endearing ties, we cannot help being filled with uneasiness at the view of

that period which must dissolve them all. But by the gospel, a remedy is provided for all such apprehensions. A Mediator is appointed, who raises even weak and guilty creatures, to glorious hopes : pardon is promised, upon repentance, and immortal happiness, to all the sincere followers of Jesus. Death, under the gospel dispensation, is only an entrance into life ; a life, pure, peaceable, and subject to no waste or decay. Look then upward with humble hope. Live mindful of death, and prepare for it ; but look upon it not as the king of terrors, but as the harbinger of immortality ; as the messenger of your Lord and Master, to deliver you from the pains and dangers of this world, and to conduct you to the mansions of immortal happiness and day. All there is light, and life, and joy ; a perpetual sunshine, without one interposing cloud : no evil, no pains, no disease, no more cruel parting pangs ; and never again shall we be torn from the embraces of those we dearly love,



## SERMON VIII.

MATTHEW, viii. 11.

*And I say unto you, that many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven.*

HAVING already, in the former sermon, considered the different methods which Providence employs to prepare men for death, and how its terrors are in some measure alleviated ; and having likewise taken a view of the more pleasing light in which it is presented to us in the gospel ; I proceed now to the other part of the proposed subject, where we shall meet, I hope, with still more powerful consolations, and more adapted to the natural wishes of man.

When death takes from us a dear and beloved friend, with whom we have long lived in the happiest and most tender connection ; when they cease to exist in this world, and the black curtain is drawn between us and them, in the first interval of ease, we eagerly enquire, do they still exist in another world, and are they happy there ? After being satisfied on both these questions, a third immediately presents itself, every way natural and reasonable—whether we are likely

ever to see them again? This is the question which now greatly occupies my mind, and to the solution of which I am soon to beg your attention; and in the result, I trust, it will appear, that virtuous friends have no room for any gloomy apprehensions, for there is great ground to believe that they shall be reunited; that they shall enjoy one another's company; but on what terms, is a secret known only to God himself, and the triumphant company above.

The text proceeds upon this principle, that virtuous friends shall again know and enjoy the society of one another. We shall *sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven*: this implies, that we shall know these venerable patriarchs, and if we know them, certainly we shall know our dearest friends.

Let us attend, then, to some of the reasons that encourage these hopes.

First: Immortal creatures, partaking of the same common nature, who have passed their state of probation in the same world, and have been sharers of the same dangers and trials, will most probably have their eternal mansions in one common region, where they will have the freest intercourse and communion one with another. We never can suppose that men will be scattered up and down in different worlds, and intermingled with beings of different natures, capacities, and tastes. The union and association of the

same creatures, can alone constitute perfect society and enjoyment. Those who have been initiated to the life of virtue in the same school, and trained up by the same discipline, will most probably reap their future rewards in the same region of the eternal world. For what society can we be so well fitted, and where can we reap such pure satisfaction, as in free and social intercourse with our fellow creatures, formerly heirs of the same weakness, sharers of the same dangers, and expectants of the same happiness, but now pure, virtuous, and perfect. The analogy of providence will carry this reasoning even further : God, in the future disposal of mankind, will most probably pay a regard to still closer connections, in order that the society of the righteous may be more perfect and complete. Perhaps our situation may be so ordered, that our intercourse and communion may be more intimate with those of the same country, and who enjoyed the same opportunities, and particularly with our virtuous friends who lived together with us at the same time, and who were nearest and dearest to us on this earth. This will be the reward and completion of that virtuous friendship which is begun here. In the present state, we have only the infancy of society ; at its best, mingled with much bitterness and many imperfections. In the other world, society will be perfect, when virtuous friends shall meet

together with pure hearts, refined natures, and formed for an everlasting duration. To awake in heaven with our memory and perfect recollection, and among the multitude of happy creatures, to find none of our virtuous friends ; to think that we shall never see them more ; that they are everlastingly lost to us ; how untuned would our hearts be for the immortal hallelujahs ! This reasoning appears so conclusive, that we cannot form a conception of the happiness of heaven, without allowing that we shall meet there with all our virtuous friends. We entertain even with horror, the very thoughts of living again, and no more to see or know those who have been the chief objects of our esteem and love. To suppose that in these blissful regions we shall have no desire for friendship ; that we shall feel no pain in forgetting all those who were so dear to us here, is a supposition that does the greatest violence and injustice to nature. Heaven, we may believe, will improve, but not change our virtuous affections : it will heighten and perfect, but not destroy them. And can we then suppose a good man so wrapt up in any contemplation or enjoyment, as to part, without pain, with every sentiment of gratitude and love ? This is a goodness which our present nature is shocked with ; and it is a goodness, that the more improved our nature is, the more it must detest and abhor. If then, in heaven, we retain

the best part of our nature, we cannot enjoy complete happiness, without the society of our virtuous friends.

But secondly : If heaven be the reward of the righteous, we must carry there a perfect recollection of all the material and interesting scenes that passed upon this earth ; such, however, in which our moral and religious characters are concerned, and such as will affect our future happiness. Heaven, to be a place of reward, implies a remembrance of the trials and dangers through which we went ; of the virtuous society we enjoyed ; of the friends with whom we associated ; and all the important events and revolutions of our lives. Memory and recollection are essential requisites for this state. No lapse of years, no distance of time, can destroy those. And shall we not, then, have the most lively impression of all those who were so dear to us in this world ? We shall then be able to distinguish and select from among the immense multitude, those who were so necessary to our happiness in this life ; those who had such a share in forming our temper and character ; those who, by their examples and manners, shewed us, in a living picture, all the charms of virtue, and led us on, by their lives, to that happiness which we now possess. To allow that we shall not know our dear friends in the mansions of glory, is to say that we shall lose our memory, our affections,

and all the remembrance of this world, and all the fruits of our labour in this probationary state ; in short, that we shall no longer be the same persons. The proof of this doctrine seems to rest upon the proof of a future state. As sure as we shall exist in the future world, so sure shall we know and associate with all our virtuous friends.

There will, it is allowed, be different degrees of happiness in heaven. As one star differeth from another star in glory, so shall mankind be in the future world. And the dearest friends may also partake of different degrees of glory. But still, these different degrees imply no separation in place ; they may subsist in the same mansions : happiness and glory depend not on place and situation. As in the same family on earth, there may be different degrees of honour and happiness, but at the same time a perfect union of affections and hearts, so in the same company in heaven, one member may exceed another in glory, but there may be a complete union of sympathy and love.

But thirdly : Revelation, which in all points accords with right reason, gives us ground to expect the future junction of the righteous in the eternal world. They are always represented as in the presence of Christ in heaven, as in the presence of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and consequently in the presence of one another.

The redeemed company make up one great assembly, which no man can number, of which Christ is the Head and Universal King. They are not, then, to be scattered up and down in different worlds, but collected into one great society, and so situated as to have a constant intercourse and connexion one with another. They shall know Christ. In the text, they are supposed also to know Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob ; and if they know those who lived in this world some thousands of years before, shall they not know their own most intimate and dearest friends ? This faculty of knowledge is frequently referred to in the New Testament. The parent shall rejoice to see his virtuous child escaped from this world of dangers, and safely landed in the heavenly kingdom ; and the child will exult to meet there with those parents who trained him up in virtue, and who had been the instruments in the hand of Providence, in conducting him to his present happiness. The wife will welcome with unspeakable pleasure her husband, now released from this troublesome world, and eased of all that grief and sorrow, which he suffered for the loss of her. The faithful minister will receive additional lustre to his crown of glory, when those of his flock, formed by his instructions, and led on by his example, shall enter into the happy mansions.

Scripture also furnishes us with some circumstances which will greatly heighten the joy of that happy meeting. We shall meet in a perfect state. The happiest union here below, is often interrupted by a thousand circumstances, the unavoidable appendages of this imperfect world. Unavoidable misfortunes hang over us in this vale of miseries, from which no care or prudence can defend us. These evils sometimes come upon us slowly : we see the storm gathering from all quarters, growing thicker and thicker, till at last it bursts in terror and in darkness. At other times, it overpowers us in a moment, and gives us no warning to provide ourselves with a shelter from the blast. Here we are tossed on a sea of trouble : we live in a world of sin and sorrow. We know not what is to befall ourselves or our friends, before our removal. We have reason to tremble for the risks that we daily run, and for the danger to which our friends are constantly exposed. How many thousands that set forward in life with the most pleasing prospects, and the fairest characters, have sunk long ere their sun was set, into misery and disgrace. But the place where we shall meet our friends again, is the new Jerusalem, the region of perfect harmony and peace, the everlasting kingdom of our Father and our God. No death, nor misery, shall enter there ; no disease can disturb that happy country ; no sin, no



sorrow; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes. There, there will be a perpetual spring; nature will shew her most joyful face; our friends, flourishing in immortal youth; angels, their ministering spirits; the blessed Jesus, their adorable companion; and God, their present and perpetual protector. Peace and order; love and good will; union and harmony, shall reign for ever and ever. Will it not be a transporting pleasure, when carried by our guardian and attendant angels to the heavenly mansions, to be welcomed there by the redeemed company, and by our dearest friends, rejoicing to see us safely landed in the regions of immortal day? And after having obtained the victory over death, to see again those on whom our heart and souls were fixed, and to meet again with the persons dear to us as our own souls, will be joy unspeakable and full of glory.

Moreover, in that place, they and we shall be free from all imperfections. They will not be such weak and frail creatures as they were when on this earth. They will not then be subject to any of those little passions, which create so much uneasiness in this imperfect state. There will be in heaven no jarring interests, no peevishness, no jealousies and mutual distrusts, none of those troublesome passions which disturb all our earthly enjoyments. All the irregular passions will be perfectly cured; all the perturbations and

emotions of the heart fully composed. They will then be nowise selfish, nor capricious in their judgments; no longer misled by wrong biasses; no false views, no evil inclinations to disturb the tranquillity and repose of that perfect state. Their bodies also will share in the perfection of their minds. Our hearts shall never more ache for their troubles, nor suffer anxiety on their account. Never more shall we tremble for the issue of their tedious and painful disorders, or weep over them for those distempers, which we can neither ease nor cure. Old age shall never overtake them, nor infirmities unfit them for their blessed employments. Death shall never again tear them from our embraces, and leave us forlorn and disconsolate. Never shall we have again to mourn for their loss, or feel again the want of their sweet counsel and assistance, weeping over the dear orphans they have left behind. Their bodies will be like Christ's glorious body, flourishing in immortal youth. Their souls will be noble and elevated, and their minds in perfect harmony with the great Father and Governor of all. What pleasure will it be to meet with them in these circumstances, and how delightful will be our intercourse, when they and we shall be thus changed, improved, and perfected!

To these arguments, drawn from reason and scripture, for the union of virtuous friends in the future world, it might add some weight to shew,

that such has been the general belief of all mankind, and discovers itself always whenever the eternal world is mentioned. In proof of this general expectation and desire, several evidences might be produced, but one remarkable instance will be sufficient. We have it in the words and reasonings of a very eminent and virtuous heathen. The conclusion of it is in this beautiful and strong language. "O glorious day! when  
 "I shall retire from this low and sordid scene,  
 "to associate with the divine assembly of de-  
 "parted spirits, and with my beloved son, that  
 "best of sons, and most valuable of men. If I  
 "seemed to bear his death with fortitude, it was  
 "by no means because I did not most sensibly  
 "feel the loss that I had sustained: it was be-  
 "cause I supported myself with the consoling  
 "reflection, that we could not long be separated." If these wise heathens, then, could cherish this persuasion, when they had nothing but the light of nature to go to, how much greater reason have we, to whom life and immortality are brought to light by the gospel, to support ourselves with this pleasing hope. Virtuous friends will then have access to one another; they will know one another; and those pure affections which were begun in this world, will be improving, purifying, and strengthening throughout all eternity. This is that happiness, which improved nature constantly craves, and it is certainly that which God is providing for all his faithful servants.

And are our virtuous friends then in these blessed abodes? To be sure of this, is the most perfect consolation that religion can now give; and to meet there with my dearest friend, is a most pleasing hope in my present situation.

From such doctrines, the following reflections and duties naturally arise:

1st, Attachment to the memory of our departed virtuous friends, will preserve in us a love and attachment to their virtues. Would we not wish to act in every respect agreeably to their wishes, and to avoid those things which we are sure would meet with their disapprobation? Though dead, let them still speak unto us. Their love to true goodness is not decreased. If they were to be the witnesses of our conduct, they would plead still more forcibly and affectionately, the cause of virtue. Be assured, you cannot better please them, than by walking steadfastly in the ways of the Lord. Messengers are constantly passing from this to the other world, to report our conduct; and if the blessed in heaven are capable of receiving any increase to their joy, they will be delighted to hear, that those whom they loved are treading in their steps, so that when God's good time shall come, they will be their everlasting companions.

2d, These principles enlarge the boundaries and duration of every virtuous friendship. We see it here only in its beginning, where all

things are in a state of the greatest imperfection. A number of circumstances are perpetually interposing to disturb the enjoyments of our friends. In the other world, friendship will be perfect and meet with no interruptions. Death suspends for a while, that pleasing intercourse ; but when we meet again, all virtuous connexions will be renewed and increased, and all will be triumph and joy.

3d, The imperfect and perishing nature of all earthly enjoyments, should excite our diligence to form perpetual and lasting friendships. Our pains here, in some measure keep pace with our pleasures, in order to prevent us fixing our affections too much on this world. If at one time we are happy in the possession of pure and virtuous friendship, disease and death step in. They tear in pieces all the ties of our tender affections, and by depriving us at once of such pleasures, they lay on us a severe tax for all our former enjoyments. We suffer then in some measure, in proportion to what we enjoyed. I speak not these things to arraign either the justice or goodness of Providence. All things are ordered for the best. This disposition and arrangement of things here below, is to warn us to form friendships that will stand the test of death,—that death cannot dissolve. Build your friendships then, upon the the rock of virtue, Be neither dazzled by beauty, nor blinded by

interest, nor attracted by talents. All these are perishing and corruptible. A good heart, good principle, and an amiable disposition, are the only chances of happiness; they will yield most pleasure in life, and afford the best comfort at death. Connect not yourselves with wickedness. Take into your bosom, only such as you may hope to meet with again in heaven. Let all your connexions be formed on this principle, that none of your friends may be everlastingly lost.

4th, Keep constantly in view, the eternal welfare of all your friends. Labour by your instruction and by your example, to inspire them with every amiable and excellent quality. So live together, and so regulate your friendly intercourse, that your friendships may be renewed and greatly improved hereafter.

Lastly, Help to bear one another's burdens. Never publish to the world, one another's frailties and infirmities. Keep free from all bitterness and strife. When the cord of friendship is cut by death, the remembrance of any little difference is a galling wound in the heart of the survivor. Study to make all proper allowances for the peculiarity of temper. Our time here is uncertain, and as you know not how long you will have to travel together, *see that you fall not out by the way.*

## SERMON IX.

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GENESIS viii. 22.

*While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.*

WE draw near to the close of the present year, and a year is a considerable portion of our existence, and this makes a great advance to that step, when time, to us, shall be no more. Time, in its flux, is, to us, strongly marked, with a view to make on us a deep impression. Without any introduction, I shall proceed to state the marks of the fleeting nature of time, and the instructions that it conveys, from which we shall have an opportunity of contemplating the wisdom and goodness of Providence in this dispensation. And as we go along, we shall be called upon to contemplate the manifest design of God to call our attention to him, in this part of his wonderful works. The great variety of the days in the year, with respect to their length, their temperature, their fruitfulness, and distinguished at the same time, by being wet or dry, hot or cold, snowy or rainy, calm or blowing, and other varieties, display the management of infinite

wisdom, to answer some good and wise purpose. Some, to make the appearance of the earth correspond with their ideas of excellence, would have, that the world, the antediluvian world, was smooth and uniform, no high hills or deep vallies: others, that the days were of equal length, and verdure and spring perpetual. But all these are fancies, ill-grounded, and without sufficient knowledge or taste. The variety, constitutes beauty, and at the same time, usefulness. Man never, with all his fancies or ingenuity, can improve upon the plan of infinite wisdom. The high mountains form a beautiful and useful contrast to the deep vallies; the barren rocks give beauty to the fertile plains, and answer other wise and good purposes. The hills serve to collect and condense the moisture floating in the atmosphere; from the tops of which it penetrates and descends into the springs which are formed in the hills, and in its descent, it becomes filtered and purified; thence it issues in streams, forming brooks and rivers, and these, in their progress to the ocean, the great receptacle of the waters, furnish drink for man and beast. Here, then, by this single instance, you see the beauty and wisdom of the works of the Creator. How much more perfect is this view of the earth, and what impression should it make upon us, And to this, I might



add, that we may see various other excellent and good purposes by this figure of the earth.

Again, with respect to the division of time, into day and night, we see evident proofs of the most perfect wisdom and goodness. Man, in his rash judgment and fancies, would perhaps wish, that there was no night, in the division of time, but all day. But pause, and think, before you give your assent to this rash judgment. In the first place, the very division constitutes a beauty. Night has its benefits and lessons as well as day; and many good purposes to answer. In the day we see the sun in all his glory, a beautiful emblem of the Creator, rolling round, and speaking his praise to all lands. In his progress, he speaks different instructions by his very appearance. In the morning he is mild and gentle, so that we can view him without injury to our eyes; he gathers strength as he mounts up in the heavens,—his glory is too great to be contemplated; he descends again in the afternoon, shorn of his beams, invites us to look upon him, when he is preparing to bury himself beneath the western ocean,—not in idleness, but to convey his instructions to different lands. Like the great Creator, he never slumbers nor sleeps. The instructions by night are still more important: a new and glorious scene is presented; new worlds are dispersed in the heavens, of various sizes, from stars of the first magnitude,

growing gradually less and less, till they be lost in minuteness; only when we take the benefit of telescopes, then a new creation bursts upon us. We are lost in infinity; we can set no bounds, even by imagination, to the works of God. *Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty! What instruction! O that men would praise the Lord for his goodness!* How do these contemplations humble men, who speak and act as if all these things were made for them! And the ignorant enthusiast, who would persuade himself, and whose creed tells him, that he alone is worthy of the care and attention of the Creator, and whose tenets swell him up with the conceit, that one part of mankind were created for endless bliss, and another part devoted to endless misery; and that he and his small party alone, are to enjoy the magnificence of heaven. O God, look down in pity and in mercy on those, whose presumption and vanity raise them so high in their imagination, and who suppose that all the host of heaven were formed to do glory to them.

Night answers many other good purposes; it is particularly favourable for refreshment and sleep. When the sun withdraws his rays, or rather retires to other worlds, the beasts of the field retire to their folds, the birds of the air to their nests; silence and darkness assume their dominion; and this state of nature invites men and beasts to enjoy their necessary refreshment

and repose. This is another instance of the care and kindness of our Creator. He leaves not these things to the governors of this world, the tyrants sometimes, and sometimes the task-masters of men. He lays this strong injunction on our masters : what a pleasing character of his government ; it is wisdom adorned with goodness. His goodness disposes him to consult the happiness of his offspring ; and his wisdom furnishes the best means. Rest and refreshment are necessary to recover and recruit the powers exhausted by the labours of the day. Sleep is the refreshment required, and to compass this, he draws round us the dark curtain of night, and composes the world into silence. Men often break through this disposition and kindness of the Creator, but for this they are answerable ; the task-masters of this world often impose upon their labourers excessive and unnecessary toil. The sensualists spend the night, devoted to rest, in riotous mirth and debauchery. This breach of the commands of our wise Legislator, does not pass unnoticed and unpunished. The life of intemperance is punished by disease, and sometimes by remorse ; and when intemperance is joined to idleness, another punishment follows—poverty, contempt, and want.

But to proceed : The revolution of the seasons bears another most conspicuous proof of Providence, and of that perfection in which God car-

ries forward his great work. In the language of the text, this revolution was fixed by the command of the Creator, immediately after the flood. If this revolution and change of the seasons did take place before the flood, we may call the order given in the words of the text, a re-establishment of that revolution. The variety of the seasons is a beautiful illustration of the wisdom of the Creator, and it adds to this beauty, that the seasons are various at the same time throughout the world; and also at the same time, there is variety in the length of the day. The great Governor is not limited to one plan : his plans are various and infinitely diversified. Whilst we have our summer, the inhabitants in the southern hemisphere have their winter; and when we have our short days on the north side of the equator, the people on the south side have their long days. Again, when we have our noon day, those on the opposite side have their midnight. The sun is perpetually rising and setting; he is in all his different appearances at the same time, and in different parts of the world, ever active, ever conferring the bounties and goodness of the Creator to all his offspring; a fit emblem and evidence of that great Being, who is ever active and vigilant. This revolution of the seasons, has continued unchangeable since the appointment; there has been no stop, no alteration, no suspension: here we can go back for several

thousands of years. There is no principle from which we have a more complete evidence for the existence of a great First Cause, than the revolution of the seasons. We cannot devise a reason or a principle to account for them, but that there is a God. If you try to account for them on any other principle, you may find words to puzzle, but no principle that can yield satisfaction. You may say chance ; but what is that ? A word without meaning. Only He who is from everlasting to everlasting, the Father of eternity. What other evidence could you ask for, to convince you that there is a God supreme in nature ? And this revolution of the seasons brings along with it a clear evidence, indeed a demonstration, of some of the most pleasing perfections of the Supreme Being. He is omnipresent : I mean to say, it proves to us that he is present constantly in every place, and at all times, for the constant revolution of the seasons requires a never ceasing exertion of Divine power : and as in no place, the revolution is suspended, so the great Governor must be present every where. We have no conception how this can be effected. Rest satisfied with the established and undeniable fact, and submit your minds to the appointments of God. The revolution of the seasons presents us with different and instructive views of the God of the seasons. We may call spring the beginning of the seasons, when the earth, rising from its gloomy

appearance, naked and barren, begins to put forth the young plants, pushing up first the tender blade, and after that, the bud of the flower, carefully wrapped up in its delicate covering, gradually expanding its flowers to the sun, cherished with his warm beams, and increasing in strength till the fruit ripens ; and all this has some good design in view,—it is preparing food for man and beast. When the provision is ready, the young of the different animals come forth to enjoy the bounty prepared for them by the great Father of all. The wisdom of this process is evident. For if the young were to make their appearance at an earlier period, they must soon perish for lack of food. And were they brought forth in the height of summer, when grass is abounding, or cherished by the nourishing heat of the summer's sun, yet the year being soon upon the decline, the cold would come upon them, before they had fully arrived at maturity, and before their strength was sufficiently increased, to enable them to provide for themselves, or experience had prepared them with knowledge properly to know their food, to search it out, and to direct it for their sustenance. No skill, no knowledge, no wisdom, can equal that which is impressed upon them by the Creator. It may be alleged, that provision more than enough is furnished them by Him, who causes grass to grow for the cattle,

and herbs, and corn, and wine for the use and service of man ; if he gives more than is necessary, that is proper to shew forth the greatness of his goodness, and the riches of his provision ; it is the generosity of a kind parent, which delights to communicate happiness to his creatures ; and the profusion of his bounty is not wasted, it helps to fertilize the earth, and so to prepare for a future harvest : this remark is proper to be introduced here, which can be solved only by a reference to the wisdom of our Maker. The food of the different animals is adapted to their nature and constitution, but cannot be equally beneficial to all. The food, for instance, which nourishes and feeds to the highest perfection, the horse, the ox, and the sheep, could not on the greatest extremity, preserve the life of man. We cannot account for this. The ox and the sheep feed on the rich pasture, grow on that food to the perfection of their nature, and so become the richest food for man. But man, while he has their food in the greatest abundance, cannot convert it, by any preparation of cookery, to save his life. Man cannot, by all his learning, apply this to his use, and for the salvation of his life. This reads to us an instructive lesson on our absolute dependance on God. By such restriction, he keeps us in close dependance upon himself. And it shews us the propriety of that prayer, *feed me with food*

*convenient for me.* Another proof of God's wisdom in managing his offspring and providing for them, at the appointed season, is by implanting in them that wonderful knowledge and power of removing themselves when the changes of the seasons require it, to those climates where food is found for them, when it fails in their usual abodes; and inspires them with the wonderful power of conveying themselves in a direct and straight course, through the pathless air, by instinct alone, to that land, and at the proper season. Who is it that gives knowledge, strength, and resolution, to effect that wonderful voyage? In these various ways we see our God. And it is one of those important secrets which man, with all his research and industry, has never been able to say correctly, where the abode of those birds of passage is, in their absence from their usual home. Other animals, again, take shelter in holes, and spend the cold of winter in profound repose. There is a disputed point where they make their retreat; and we cannot tell how life is maintained without sustenance, or what sustenance is provided for them. Though we can find no satisfactory solution to these dark and difficult questions, yet it may strengthen our belief in questions more interesting and difficult, applicable to points of the greatest concern to man. How is the same man preserved, when the spirit passes from him, and how reunited,



to constitute the same body ? We cannot tell. And why then should it be thought a thing incredible with us, that God should raise the dead ? *He is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working.* The work is not impossible in the hand of Him who created the heavens and the earth.

In the revolution of the seasons, there is a perpetual change, which proceeds gradually to increase or decrease. Strictly speaking, there are no two days precisely of the same length : the second day, when the days are lengthening, has increased a little ; or when shortening, has decreased a little,—always upon the change. And when they have advanced to their utmost length, they return again on the decrease. These varieties are beautiful, and they give to us a certain proof that the Power which effects these changes, is constantly at work ; that his providence never ceases to carry forwards his great design : an undeniable proof that we are ever with God. And what a lively impression ought this to make upon our minds ! what confidence should it inspire in his management ! And the proper reflection that offers itself at this season, is the variety of the weather which we partake of in these different seasons. The variety and changes brought by the lengthening and shortening of the days, depends upon some fixed principle, and that principle we can see and understand ; it can be explained perfectly to our satisfaction

upon the principles of astronomy, and so completely, that we can tell the precise length of the day or of the night, at any given time. But there is another variety respecting the temperature of the weather, for which we have got no principles of science that can enable us to calculate. We cannot tell what portion of heat we shall have, or what degree ; or the quantity of rain, or dry weather ; of wind, or calm ; of snow, or hail ; of frost, the degree or duration.—All these are secrets. At the conclusion of the year, men commonly give to the year a character, by which it may be distinguished afterwards, in the natural history of that year. And no more can we foresee and foretell what may happen in the course of that year, in the civil or military history of the world ; to our native country, and its most important concerns ; to ourselves, our families, or our friends.—All these are secrets known only to God, and they are wisely concealed from us, for the knowledge of such future events would in general serve only to distress us. Some things we could wish to know, such as might be favourable to us ; but those things that might be favourable to us, might be unfortunate to our friends, and consequently unpleasant, and perhaps might tend to produce envy often bordering upon hatred, and not unlikely disagreement. Much better, then, for both to remain in ignorance ; much better for our happiness. All this dark-

ness is an evidence of the wisdom and goodness of Him, who in all these appointments, in what he giveth and taketh away, consults equally the happiness of his subjects. Keeping back from us these parts of knowledge, is the greatest act of kindness ; it is concealing what would only distress us, and leaving us more at liberty to direct our time and our labours to those things of more importance to our happiness and improvement. Our times pass away under various circumstances, which are all under the direction of God. Some make their appearance on this earth, shew themselves, and retire, without any use that we can see, either good or bad ; they answer no purpose that we can understand, unless it be to let us see a variety in the creation of God ; or that their removal may answer as an exercise or trial to those to whom they belong. And many of those whose life is prolonged to many years, answer no better purpose than those who are removed in infancy. This can be no greater objection to the wisdom or goodness, to the mighty plan of the government of God, than many other things. It will be difficult to shew what good end the rank weeds answer, for what end the poisonous plants are permitted ; nor in the animal creation, can we shew a satisfactory cause for the permission of the snakes and serpents, the vipers ; or the ravenous animals, the hyæna, the tiger, that occupy the deserts, and

lord it over the forest: nor can we prove the utility of the sharks, in the ocean, or of the crocodiles, and alligators, in the rivers. Our knowledge is extremely limited; nor are we warranted to suppose that goodness is the sole object for forming the animals, or vegetables, or plants, or fishes, or even for man. Finding in the works of the Creator, things that bear not the characters of goodness, in our estimation, is no evidence that they are not formed with design; and in another sense, it may not be in contradiction to the general character given to his works on their first creation, that all was good, in the sense that it answered the wise purposes for which it was intended. The formation of our plants, or animals, was to give us an evidence of the power of the Creator. Afflictions are not immediately good to us, but they answer many good purposes: they spring not from the dust; they are the appointments of God. In like manner, noxious plants, and animals, may in an indirect manner, answer many wise and good purposes: so also may storms and tempests; they are not good in themselves, and not desirable; but they may answer, and no doubt they do answer, many excellent purposes. Snow and hail, thunder and lightning, are the works of the Almighty: they proclaim the presence of the Creator; he uttereth his voice in the thunder. These things, which we consider as evils, and are found on the

earth; shew us what power God has, and can exercise, and of course, how much we depend on God. The present year is now about to perish, and cannot be recalled ; it will soon be lost in the shoreless ocean of eternity. Time steals away insensibly. When we have the year before us, and look forward to its termination, that period seems long ; but when past, and we look backward, that period has dwindled to nothing, and left scarcely a trace behind : it leaves nothing that is substantial. Into what a short space does memory crowd the transactions of a year ! and deduct the time passed in sleep, in trifles, in eating and drinking, in vanity, in fruitless conversation, and little will remain that we have done for our real improvement, for our friends, for the good of mankind, and for eternity. The time that remains to us, we cannot tell how short ; we cannot tell when it will finish ; we have no right to expect more warnings ; it will steal insensibly, perhaps rapidly, and it may end suddenly and in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. We see men cut off at all ages : we can have no dependance on youth, on health, on strength, on prudence, on temperance. If we recollect, we shall find, during the course of this year, we may have lost some of our friends and acquaintance, who perhaps started with a chance full as favourable as some of us, but are now in the unseen world. Such instances become warn-

ings to us to be diligent, *for we know neither the day nor the hour when the Son of Man cometh.* Nor can we tell the circumstances under which he may come, whether suddenly and without any previous warning, or slowly, by a gradual decay. And had we a choice, we should be perplexed to make an election. Both kinds have their advantages and their disadvantages. Well, therefore, is it for us, that God does not grant us a choice, in cases of this kind. He takes our case into his own hand, and decides without consulting us: and all for the best. Such an arbitrary proceeding, is delivering us from much anxiety and trouble. And let God's will be done. Men are taken off at all ages, and this leaves society in a happy mixture of young and old, of strong and weak. Old age presides and gives counsel and example to youth; and youth gives cheerfulness and vigour to old age. 'The experience of age gives hope and comfort to advanced years. And as we know not the day of our death, neither can we tell the day, the year, or the age, when the Son of Man shall come to put a period to the present frame of nature, and to judge the world. 'The year passes on in a manner similar to the life of man. It commences, we will suppose, with the short days, and increases gradually till they arrive at the greatest length; and that being gained, they return and descend gradually, till they come to

the point from which they started : but there is no stop. This constitutes that perpetual motion which the philosopher is perpetually hunting after. The heavens are constantly pursuing their appointed course, and the labours of man are equally constant, till that day when the Son of Man shall display his standard in the air : the trumpet shall sound to call the dead from their silent mansion, and all the labours of man shall terminate. The kings, the princes, and governments of this world, shall for ever cease ; then, emblems of power and authority shall for ever be dissolved, and God alone shall assume the dominion of the world, and he shall be all in all.

The conclusion of the year gives us this warning, but it is only a general warning, and we cannot tell when it is to be accomplished : only let us ever be in readiness, that we be not taken by surprise ; that when we shall see our Lord coming, and all his holy angels with him, we may welcome him, and say, *even so, come Lord Jesus.*

We have seen the prediction in the text hitherto faithfully fulfilled ; and this gives us good ground to believe, that it will be fully accomplished hereafter. Our own experience, and history, so far as it carries us back, supports the prediction. We have found, that, *while the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night*

*shall not cease.* When this prediction was given, we had no assurance but the faith of this prediction. Suppose a man should have been for the first time witness to a partial revolution, and have been told, that such was to be the case ; and the prediction given in the height of summer, and to follow, that the days should gradually decline, short days succeeding the long, the cold of winter taking place of the heat of summer, snow that of refreshing rain. Would not he entertain some doubts of the accomplishment ? But the continuance of these facts being confirmed, not by one year, but by thousands never yet having failed, must he not now be fully established in the belief of this principle ? And this brings with it a confirmation of some of the most important articles of our holy religion. And the works of nature bear testimony to the doctrines and promises of Jesus Christ, to the general resurrection, and to the second coming of the Son of Man. Reasoning upon these facts, makes our religion more rational, and more firmly establishes it. Otherwise, without a rational foundation, it is unstable : you may believe any thing, the greatest absurdity. Hence we see so many tossed about with every wind of doctrine. *But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night ; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works*



*that are therein, shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness? May the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you. To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever.*

## SERMON X.

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1 TIMOTHY, vi. 7.

*For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.*

THESE words may be taken up as a detached sentence. And it is one of those self-evident truths, that require no proof. I proceed, therefore, without any introduction, to make some reflections on this naked state of man, and to point out the instructions and duties arising from it. Job has a sentiment exactly the same, *Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither; the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord.* And the Psalmist says, *For when he dieth, he shall carry nothing away.* Man cometh into the world, the most destitute and the most forlorn of all creatures. He has nothing to supply his wants, and he can do nothing for himself; he can move neither hand nor foot; he cannot flee from danger, or even turn himself; and if provision be laid before him, he has no power to take it in. It is observed by one, who gives a most unfavourable picture of human nature, that in this situation, the only thing that

a man can do, is to weep.\* And he also continues long in this helpless and destitute situation. The beasts of the field come forth clothed ; they have a covering of thick hair, to defend them from the inclemency of the weather. The birds of the air have their first covering of soft down, which is soon exchanged for a thick covering of feathers, which not only protects them from the cold, and the wet, but enables them also to remove from place to place, with their wings, and to provide for themselves food and convenient habitations. And these creatures are soon qualified to seek after that food which Providence has caused to arise every where. For it is to be remarked, that the young of the birds, and of the wild beasts, are in general, not brought forth, until the spring sets in, and a table is spread for them. In all this, we see the beneficent hand of a kind Providence. The calf, and the foal, and the lamb, and other creatures of that kind, are able to walk almost as soon as they are born, and directed by instinct, without any kind of instruction, they apply to the breast of their mother for their food, and in a short time, become independent, and procure every thing for their own wants. And it may be mentioned, as another mark of the interposition and management of Providence, that all the ties

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\* See Pliny's Natural History, beginning of chap. vii.

between the parent and offspring, are soon dissolved. We can discover no knowledge in them of any relationship. The birds, after their birth, continue a few days in a helpless state, in their nest, waiting for the food which the parent bird is collecting with the greatest anxiety and care. And how wonderful is the attention shewn during that period, by the parent bird! She is anxious to supply their wants: and in the protection of her young, she often risks her own life, in defending her brood from the enemy. But man comes forth naked, without any kind of covering, without any power to provide for himself; and he continues in that state,—that helpless state,—not for days only, but for months and years, he can do nothing for himself. And this is the condition of man, who assumes to himself the dominion over all the other creatures; man, the lord of this lower world, who is possessed of more understanding than the beasts of the field, and more knowledge than the fowls of heaven. It may seem proper also to observe, that the other powers of the inferior animals are perfect from the first. Their instinct does not improve in perfection as they advance in years. But this is not the case with man. His body is weak, his intellects are weak. Both body and mind advance in strength and perfection, as they advance in life. And can we then suppose, that Providence does thus aban-

don man alone, of all creatures? Let us not suppose this to be the case. God provides for him in a different manner, and by a care gradual and without interruption. He never leaves man without a witness: and he provides for him in such a manner, as to shew and prove his higher destination; to point him out as the immortal offspring of God himself, whose care manifested towards him, is gradual, uninterrupted, and equally conspicuous.

He implants in the breast of the parent the strongest of all affections; and this discovers itself as soon as the child is born, in a variety of ways; and all, one way or other, pointing out the hand of God: this is to be found in every natural and well regulated mind. The power and influence of this is seen in the mother watching over her infant and helpless child: this attachment grows and increases every day. She is ever employed in carefully clothing it, feeding it, nursing it; and in all the little ailments to which the child is liable, the mother follows it with the utmost anxiety, sharing in all its little sorrows, and rejoicing in its joys; weeping sometimes when it weeps, and again smiling when it smiles. And this is not a transitory affection, soon raised, and soon suppressed; it is a lasting connexion; it endures through life, and continues often after death, and leaves not the good parent after death—it is united

in eternity. To be without this affection, argues the deepest depravity. It is that affection, which in a well regulated mind, acquires the ascendancy over every other affection. When children increase in number, it is not transferred from the older to the younger, but it spreads over all; and it is that affection which can be divided without being weakened. What will a mother not bear, what will she not suffer, and what labour will she not undertake, for the benefit and happiness of her babe. This affection, when kept under proper regulation, is the most amiable of all the affections, if it do not degenerate to a blind attachment, winking at all the foibles and vices of the child. This affection seems ready and prepared to receive the helpless infant, immediately on its entrance upon life, accompanying the child throughout the whole of its helpless state. In the different manner of providing for the different creatures, we see both the wisdom and beneficence of Providence. Were the beasts to come into life in this naked and helpless state, the parent, however strong its affection, could never furnish clothing and food for its young; therefore the kind Parent of all, makes an immediate provision, by a proper covering. But man, endowed with reason and understanding, is capable of contriving and working for a sheltering for his offspring, which are cast upon him naked and helpless. Here

then we see an excellent distinction in the duty of trust and reliance on Providence. That which we can do for ourselves, we ought to do, what labour and foresight can effect ; all these are to be called into exertion. It is a foolish reliance to fancy, that if you do not take care of your child, that Providence will : what assiduity and diligence cannot do, these let us leave to God ; cast your cares upon him. For instance, for the sake of illustration : a parent, when health and when opportunity offers, can do great things for providing food and raiment for his family ; but he cannot, in many cases, preserve or restore health ; here, trust in God. We have no claim to any thing. *We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.* Again, this helpless condition of infancy, tells us that it is a duty for us to labour, and that idleness is a curse. Labour is necessary for the growth and strength of the faculties, both of body and of mind. Idleness generates disease, vice, poverty, and almost every bad passion.

Again, the long continuance in man of the state of dependance, is to give an opportunity to the parents, not only to provide for the bodily wants of their children, but more especially to instill into them good principles of every kind. This is the fittest season ; the mind is then most easily bent and formed, and good impressions made then are more likely to be lasting. You must have much

more dependance upon them, than on those sudden conversions which are now so fashionable. It is not easy to root out habits deeply fixed, and become, in some measure, a part of ourselves. At this season, the mind is not preoccupied with other passions, with the love of the world or the things of the world ; with the lust of gain, with ambition, &c. We see, then, the wisdom of this appointment, in casting man helpless and naked on this world ; and this points out the distinction between the different destinies. Man is not intended for the present state, but for a higher existence, for which instruction, moral and religious, is the best preparation ; the lower animals are formed for this earth. And the long continuance of this state, under the power and subjection of the parents, speaks in the strongest language ; their duty is to instill into them good principles, corresponding to their heavenly origin, to form the temper and the habits answering to that state. And this is the best portion, and the only one to be depended upon, that you can give. You cannot command for them the world, nor the things of this world : all these things are fleeting and uncertain. But you have it in your power to give unto them good instruction, and good example ; and this is the best inheritance, and the best qualification for present and for future happiness, and the best preparation for every situation in life, and for making a man



agreeable to his friends, to his family, for prosperity and adversity. Thus Providence has placed most within our own power, the things which are of the greatest value and importance ; and on the other hand, Providence has left in a precarious and uncertain state, things which are not absolutely necessary for our happiness. Such are wealth, and riches, and all the goods of fortune, health and strength, and even knowledge, and many things that may render us agreeable and useful. Again, during this helpless state, those ties are formed between the parent and the child, which are to constitute that lasting connexion, which should never be dissolved. The parental affection continues during life, to watch their children and family through all the different stages, so long as the union endures ; so that when command and authority fail, reason, and good advice and kindness, help to regulate and check ; and on the part of the child, when filial affection begins to give place to other affections, gratitude and duty now take place, to make up to the parents for all the trials and sufferings which they have endured on behalf of the child. Again, these affections stretch beyond life, by hoping and wishing for the continuance of existence and of love ; and the gospel confirms all these wishes and hopes, by the promises of immortality, placed on the best foundation.

Further : All these circumstances laid together, should cure men of covetousness of earthly things, for they belong not to us ; *for we brought nothing into this world* ; God gives all ; he provides for us in infancy, and in every stage of life : and the next thing, *it is certain we can carry nothing out*. This needs no proof. This, then, should place a proper limit to all the labours and anxieties of man. There is in man a strong desire for getting and heaping up all the things of this earth ; man, who, during the helpless state of infancy, not for days only, but for months and years, can do nothing for himself : and this is the condition of man who assumes to himself the dominion over all the other creatures, the lord of this lower world, who is possessed of more understanding than the beasts of the field, and more knowledge than the fowls of heaven.

We may often see how Providence defeats all the plans and schemes of man, in directing things to flow in a channel contrary to that which he has prepared, and which Infinite Wisdom sees to be more proper ; and this is to teach us, not only that we can carry nothing out, but that we cannot settle it where we please. Man loses all power, in a great measure, the moment he yields up the ghost. Fortunes often procured with much labour and anxiety, and settled with great care and foresight, pass into families for which they never were designed. This settle-

ment is brought about by different ways and means, which could not be foreseen nor provided against : sometimes by marriages and connexions formed by the persons to whom they have been allotted ; sometimes by their wills and dispositions. In this manner Providence acts contrary to the plans and contrivances of man, and disposes of things according to his sovereign will and pleasure. Such considerations should suppress the disease of covetousness, and check men's unreasonable attachment to the things of this life. Great fortunes seldom produce great good to mankind. 'The heart does not open, but shuts itself up straiter to hold the world more closely in its grasp. The consideration, then, of the evils they produce, and the small power which man has over them at last, should check our too eager desire after earthly things ; for, let him lock it up ever so closely in the strictest settlement, it can soon be dissolved by different means ; by unforeseen connexions, by waste and extravagance, by the effects of law, and sometimes by the hand of power. Man knows not to whom, what he leaves, shall pass—to a wise man or a fool ; *but it is certain we can carry nothing out.* Such is the tenure by which we hold all earthly possessions—*we can carry nothing out* ; and we cannot dispose of them according to our pleasure. 'The houses, the land, the wealth and riches of this world, are constantly shifting and changing ;

they are constantly dropping their masters, as the trees do their leaves. And the only things that a man can occupy, is that narrow house appointed for all living, and even that he cannot possess always, his bones and his very dust must be removed to give place to other tenants. Here *the rich and the poor meet together, and the servant is not distinguished from his master*. What then signifies all the wealth and the riches of man, when removed? there is no more respect paid to his mortal remains. There may be great parade at his funeral, and his tomb may be decorated with flattering inscriptions, and the mourners may go about the streets. His wealth may cause his death to be sought for, that the spoils may be divided, for he can carry nothing with him.

Seek, then, those principles, and follow that course of life, which will yield pleasure and comfort at all times, which will make life respectable, death comfortable, and the future life everlastingly happy,

After having offered these reflections on the naked state of man, I come to point out the duties arising from it. In the former part of the discourse, I have observed, that man, particularly, comes forth naked into the world. The young of beasts come into the world with a covering of hair, to protect them; the birds with a covering of down, which grows into feathers. But

man is brought into the world naked and totally helpless, and can do nothing for himself; his reliance, then, is upon his mother, and next, upon God. We here draw a distinction in matters of trust, and may remark, that what things we can do for ourselves, we ought to do, looking up to God for his assistance and blessing. What labour and foresight can do, these should be called into exertion. It would be a foolish reliance on Providence, to say, that if you do not take care of your child, Providence will. What assiduity and diligence cannot do, let us leave to God. Cast your care upon him. We have no claim to any thing from our birth. Rely on God.

Again, this helpless condition of infancy, tells us that it is a duty for us to labour, and that idleness is a crime. Labour is necessary for the growth and strength of the faculties both of body and mind. Idleness generates disease, poverty, vice, and every bad passion. Again, the long continuance in a state of dependance, is to give an opportunity to the parents, not only of supplying their bodily wants, but of instilling into them good principles of every kind. Some wild philosophers say, children should be left to themselves to form their principles; as well may they say, they should be left to themselves to procure their food. Again, during that state, those ties are formed between the parents and child, which

constitute that lasting connexion which should never be dissolved. The parents' affections continue throughout life, to watch over the child and family, in all their different stages ; so that when command fails, reason, good advice, and kindness, help to regulate and direct ; and on the part of the child, when filial affection begins to be transferred to other objects, gratitude and duty assume their place, to make up to the parents for all the toils and sufferings which they formerly endured. Further, those affections stretch beyond life, by nature hoping and wishing for the continuance of existence and of love : and the gospel confirms all these wishes and hopes, by the promise of immortality, placed on the best foundation.

Again, all these circumstances combined, should cure us of that covetousness of earthly things, for they are not ours ; *we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out* : God gives all ; he provides for us in infancy, and in every stage of life. That he will provide for us in the next world, will be taken for granted, and this it would be lost labour to attempt to prove. This should place a proper limit to all the labours and anxieties of man : there is in him a strong passion for gathering in and heaping up the things of time, and of this earth, and we all blame and condemn it ; and we must condemn it in reason,

when it is carried to an extreme ; but this desire planted in man by the Author of his existence, serves many good purposes. It is a strong incentive to labour, to diligence, and to care. And the cares of the miser, though they cannot profit himself, yet in many cases they may be serviceable to others. Thus God causes the weakness and follies of man, to answer some wise and good purposes, in his administration of the affairs of this world. It does sometimes what reason could not do. The worldly man and the miser, in cultivating with anxiety this earth, make it more productive ; and what they save by their penury and mean spirit, must in the end do good to others. Were all men to be idle, and to measure out their desires by their real wants, the land would be neglected. And were the miser extravagant and profuse, in the enjoyment of his plenty, he would waste and destroy what would feed and render others more comfortable. But I mean not to offer this in defence of his covetous and mean spirit, but as one of the numerous arguments which we have, of the care and providence of God. He punishes the miser, by making him feel the contempt belonging to his meanness of spirit, by rendering it subservient to the good and benefit of mankind. He is condemned to work, but forbidden to enjoy. The apostle points out the whole benefit that a man can receive—*food and raiment, and therewith*

*to be content.* And every thing that he seeketh beyond that, does more harm than good. In this maxim, in its large sense, is included every comfort. But we want more, sometimes, than bare food ; we want the dainties and luxuries of life. Now experience proves, that such superfluities contribute nothing to health or to comfort. Pampering and excessive indulgence take away enjoyment ; they beget uneasiness, heaviness, drowsiness, and repress the flow of the animal spirits : they blunt also the mental powers, injure the memory, the imagination, reason, and understanding. Such things cannot add to our comfort. On the other side, what evils flow from excessive drinking. This is not a natural evil, it is always acquired.



## SERMON XI.

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MATTHEW vii. 29.

*For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the Scribes.*

**THERE** must have been something peculiar in our Saviour's method of instruction, on which this observation is founded. These words are the reflection of the historian, and it is but very seldom indeed that the Evangelists come forward with their own remarks. They tell us naked facts, and leave the world to form their judgment from them. We may suppose, then, that this discourse made a great impression on the people. Indeed, in the verse before, the Evangelist says, *The people were astonished at his doctrine.* And we have other testimonies to this part of his character, from his very enemies; *Never man spake like this man.*

First : let us then shortly inquire into the nature of his teaching with authority ; and secondly, what inferences we may fairly draw from it.

In the first place, it cannot be understood, that he made use of a haughty and commanding manner, which is a sense we have of speaking by authority, in men of the world. For we find

no trait of this domineering manner in any part of our Saviour's discourses. Besides, this would never have produced that wonder and astonishment in the multitude. He claims no earthly authority. He never lorded over his disciples, but was on all occasions, humble and meek. But we shall find other marks of his authority, which accord much better with his character, and account more rationally for the effects.

1st, There was a clearness in every thing which he said, and all his discourses were delivered with clearness,—without embarrassment or hesitation. A man speaks very differently on a subject which he perfectly understands, and where he is at the same time certain of the truth of his principles. He speaks without confusion, without faltering, and without being afraid of contradiction. This was our Lord's manner of speaking. His language was plain; his principles were certain; and therefore, he must speak with the greatest energy and freedom. The scribes could not so speak. Perhaps they were, as many religious men, both before and after the coming of our Lord have been, chiefly employed on dark subjects, which they themselves did not understand; and therefore, could not make them to be understood by their hearers. Men, then, must speak with confusion; they must often plunge into gross darkness; and whatever authority they may assume, yet their

words are without any weight or importance, and can make no impression on those who hear them. When we read over this discourse of our Lord's, we see all is clear and easy to be understood, no dark sayings, no labour, and no confusion. And the same may be affirmed of all his discourses. Whether he speaks of his Father in heaven, of his providence, of the future world, and the general judgment,—these sublime and highly interesting subjects: whether he be delivering precepts or arguments, beseeching, intreating, exhorting, or commanding;—all is clear. Another circumstance which adds to the authority of his speaking, is, that the subjects themselves, are highly interesting. Let the most eloquent man in the world, speak upon trifling subjects, in which neither himself nor his hearers feel much interest, he may amuse for a little while, but neither speaker nor hearer will feel much energy; they will grow languid and cold; and in spite of every exertion, they will betray signs of listlessness and dissatisfaction. Hence, the discourses of philosophers, when discussing their disputed topics, which few men trouble themselves about, will never be read with much pleasure. But the subjects on which our Saviour's discourses are founded, are deeply interesting to all men. He never descends to dark and doubtful points; never tires us with long and intricate reasonings; but

brings the subjects home directly and immediately to the understandings of men. Read his sermon on the mount, read his parables, his different exhortations, and you will find this character fully illustrated. He enters, you see, immediately on the subject. *Blessed are the poor in spirit, &c.* No tedious and unnecessary explanation, no laboured refinement; every part is necessary; you cannot omit a single sentence without injury. His directions upon almsgiving and prayer, are equally interesting. His prayers are all beautiful, and in the simplest language, accommodated to the meanest capacity. It is that universal prayer, which may be used by all ranks, and on every occasion. The views he gives of providence, are animated and sublime, and in which all men are concerned. The correction he gives to false professors, is equally true and forcible. *Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.* With what power does he illustrate the condition of those who perform, and of those who neglect his sayings. *Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock: and every one*

*that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.* How must every serious man feel, when he opens to us the view of the general judgment. There we see grandeur and true dignity.

2d, A further evidence of his authority, is the manner in which he pronounces blessings and woes on the different characters of men; and these founded on such clear and undisputed principles, that reason and conscience go along with him and confirm his decisions, so that we cannot dispute the justice of the sentence which he pronounces. *Blessed are the merciful, the pure in heart, and the peace makers:* and again, when he declares, *Think not that that I am come to destroy the Law, or the Prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.* And then follows the contrast so striking, between his law, and the law formerly established among men. *Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill, shall be in danger of the judgment: but I say unto you, that whosoever is angry with his brother without*

*a cause, shall be in danger of the judgment : and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council : but whosoever shall say, thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.* From this discussion, he brings forth a beautiful and most excellent moral. *Therefore, if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee ; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way ; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.* This is an illustration of that invaluable maxim, *I will have mercy and not sacrifice ;* and places the rank in which should stand those duties that we owe to our brethren and mankind. Our Saviour also introduces another most important duty : *Ye have heard that it hath been said, thou shalt love thy neighbour and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.* And the reason assigned for these duties, connects us with God himself, conveying to us the most amiable representation of our Father in heaven ; *For he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.* He pursues the same train of thought, till the following instructive conclusion : *Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven, is perfect.*

The following remark forces itself upon our attention: that it is impossible to read this sermon on the mount, without allowing, that morals, and those of the most refined degree, constitute an important part of the religion of Jesus Christ; and that religion without morality, is a monster in nature; that it must, of course, do much more harm than pure deism; for pure deism, implying a belief of a future state, supports the interest of morality: but when morality is decried and abused, as the doctrine of Jesus Christ, it must be a doctrine truly hurtful to society, and unfavourable to the success of the gospel.

3d, Another evidence of that power and authority with which he spake, is, in his condemnation of the hypocrisy and imposition of the scribes and pharisees, particularly in the xxiii. chapter of Matthew. They are so painted, that they will apply to hypocrites in all ages. Human nature is still the same, and with a few changes, it will apply to false professors of different ages. *Woe unto you, scribes and pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint, and anise, and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel. Woe unto you, scribes and pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside*

*of the cup and the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess, &c.* What words can be more powerful than this condemnation of their imposition and hypocrisy ; and there is so much reason and truth in this condemnation, that it cannot be contradicted. When speaking on this subject, his feelings rise to indignation, and swell above the bounds of moderation. In his precept on anger, he condemns that anger which is without a cause ; we are to be angry and sin not. The terms on which this precept is delivered, argue his proper acquaintance with human nature.

4th, His representation of the general judgment, shews the authority with which he spake. He pronounces sentence upon the righteous and the wicked, and declares the principles upon which their sentences are founded. That on the righteous, on a review of their lives, is, *Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? &c. And the king shall answer and say unto them, verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have*



*done it unto one of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.* Next comes the sentence of the wicked, the conclusion of which is in the following powerful words: *And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.*

5th, The case of Judas is another instance of his power and authority. At the last supper, our Lord intimated that one of the twelve should betray him. This must have produced a powerful effect, for they were well acquainted with the perfect knowledge he possessed of the human heart, and of the thoughts of men; and this warning was accompanied with this solemn declaration. *The Son of man goeth as it is written of him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! it had been good for that man if he had not been born.*

6th, The effects produced by his command, are another mark of the power with which his words were uttered. They were seen in his curing the different diseases of those who applied to him for relief. Some cures were performed when Jesus was not present with the patient. We have a case of this kind related in the viii. chapter of Matthew. *And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him, and saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented.* This centurion was perfectly ac-

quainted with the excellence and power of Jesus, and in his application, expressed the most lively faith in him. Our Lord most readily complied with his request,—he cut short the address this most excellent officer was making to him, with, *I will come and heal him.* The firm faith he had in our Saviour's power, and the high opinion he entertained of his goodness, from the concern and interest he took in the restoration of his servant, most probably prompted him to make this remarkable reply:—*Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, go, and he goeth; and to another, come, and he cometh; and to my servant, do this, and he doeth it.* And in the commendation bestowed on the centurion, Jesus delivers to all his disciples that testimony of approbation, implying a command to imitate him. It appears from the history, that our Lord did not go, at least at that time, to his house: *Jesus said unto the centurion, go thy way, and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee.* And it is added, *that his servant was healed in the selfsame hour.*

7th, At the beginning of this very chapter, we have another instance of the effect of his command. *When he was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him. And,*

*behold, there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.* Two other of the evangelists relate this same miraculous cure, and nearly in the same words. They likewise tell us, that Jesus touched him, and in this manner effected his cure. It is not necessary to say, that the touching of the patient, or the use of any other means was requisite,—his bare command was sufficient: neither was his presence required, as we have seen it proved in the case of the centurion: it was enough to express his *I will*. The manner of effecting this cure, is a strong expression of his authority. No means employed, nor any tedious operation. His very presence was sufficient: every thing was under his controul: he speaks, and stubborn diseases shrink back at his command. His power, as well as his benevolence, is seen in the manner in which the different cures were performed; some were accomplished when present,—he puts his hand upon them, and gives relief; some were brought about when he was absent, and not within the reach of the patient; and to know that it was the effect of his power, they ask with respect to the time, and they find that at the very hour that he told them, the patient was cured. In some cases he made use of the

means, as was the case of the blind man, where *he spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and he anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay.* This was an application, which would seem to us, more calculated to confirm his blindness, than to restore sight. We cannot tell, why, on such occasions, he made use of such means. But, the result shews, that means were of no use to him. It resembles most the character of his heavenly Father, who spoke from nothing this beautiful fabric,—who said, *Let there be light, and there was light.* How much must this magnify in our eyes and in our conceptions, the inconceivable power and majesty of the Creator; and in like manner, the power of his ever blessed Son is equally inconceivable, as displayed in his works. The case of the lame man, who was cured by Jesus, is in all its circumstances, beautiful. How strength was inspired into his limbs we cannot tell. What evidence have we of the cure! He takes no pains to convince the spectators of its reality. He only says, *Arise, take up thy bed, and walk.* No one now disputes the fact,—they look with astonishment on that bed, whereon a cripple had lain, perhaps for many years. He is now the wonder and astonishment of all the people. The blind receive their sight, and what delightful sensations must have filled the breasts of the individuals on whom these cures were wrought.

What different feelings must now agitate this assembly, and how must they express those feelings. We see the wonderful power of Jesus, exhibited through the medium of his disciples, in healing the man lame from his birth, who was daily laid at the beautiful gate of the temple, to ask alms of those who went in to worship ; seeing Peter and John about to enter in, asked alms of them, expecting nothing more than some temporary relief. Hear then the beautiful address of Peter : *Silver and gold have I none ; but such as I have give I thee : in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.* Immediately his limbs received strength, motion, and power to walk : he joined with the apostles as they approached to the temple, *walking, and leaping, and praising God.* What joyful feelings must he have received, and what wonder and joy must have pervaded the whole assembly, and what life and vigour must it have added to their worship ! This must have given to the temple of Jerusalem, some of that life and spirit expressed in the mansions above. The language made use of in effecting these cures, was truly the language of authority, as we see from the effects produced. We see the same authority when Jesus expelled the evil spirits. At his rebuke, they left the persons whom they possessed and tormented. Were men to make use of such language now, it would only expose

them and their cause to ridicule. In most of the cures, the effect justified their language. Such as in the cures, which I have referred to,—the blind restored to sight, the leper cleansed, the lame enabled to walk, and the sick of the palsy to arise and take up his bed. When the widow's son of Nain, was carried out to be buried, he was raised to life at the gate of the city ; and Lazarus was called from his tomb, after he had lain there four days. But there were some great favours conferred on others, where we could not judge of the effects from sight. In some cases, to the blessings bestowed on the patient, Jesus added, *thy sins are forgiven*. Some, therefore, charged him with blasphemy, and usurping the province of God ; *Who can forgive sins but God only ?* To this he replied, *Whether is easier, to say, thy sins be forgiven thee ; or to say, arise, and walk ? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy), arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house. And he arose, and departed to his house.* Seeing such instances of his power, what effect must his promises have had on his disciples. Take this along with you, and read his consolatory discourse, contained in the xiv. chapter of John, when he says, *Where I am, there ye may be also.* Here is a proof of the greatest authority. And that promise which he makes to his disciples, *When the Son of man*

*shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.* And that to the penitent thief, *This day shalt thou be with me in paradise.* Such, then, who were witnesses to all these powerful effects, might truly say, *He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.*

In the second place, from this part of his character, his teaching with authority, we see the clearest mark of a divine teacher, a perfect knowledge of his subject, the certainty with which he spake on all occasions, and in language suited to the meanest understanding. We see the effects of his authority, in the calling of his disciples. He makes use of no false hopes to entice them, no threatening to intimidate them. He makes use of nothing more than that simple command, or rather invitation, *Follow me*; upon this, they left their lawful and honest calling, by which they got their daily bread. In his appearance, there was no earthly splendour to entice them, no riches to allure them, no honours to seduce them, no ease, no prospects of power to tempt them, no expectation of earthly grandeur to engage them. He dealt honestly with them, and promised them nothing of this world to engage them to enter his service; he plainly tells them, that the world would hate and persecute them, and they would be hated of all men for his sake; that in this

world, they would meet with nothing but persecutions and sufferings. What then could be the inducement to cause these men to forsake houses and lands, and friends and families, and expose themselves to the hatred and persecution of their country? It is impossible to see any reason that can account for their conduct upon common principles. The case must be set down as extraordinary. There must have been some irresistible charm in his manner. His enemies give to us some openings to account for that great change which acted upon the disciples of our Lord. They say, *Never man spake like this man. He spake as one having authority, and not as the scribes.* Besides, the subjects on which he discoursed, were the most interesting, and profitable:—on the perfection of the Supreme Being, his power, his love, his goodness, and his providence; on a future state, and the resurrection. These were all attractive subjects, and where they are firmly believed and received, they cannot fail to make a deep impression on the mind. Besides those, there must have been some irresistible attraction in his manner, which so deeply impressed the minds of the disciples, when he made that feeling appeal to them, at the time many of his usual followers, seeing the persecutions and troubles that they must encounter, turned back; Jesus perceiving this, addressed his disciples, with, *Will ye also*



*go away ? He receives for answer, Lord, to whom shall we go ? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.*

Remarks : His goodness was manifested in an especial manner, as a reward for the goodness of the applicant. The centurion, who applied to our Lord, seemed to be an officer of the most excellent character : it was in behalf of a servant that he applied. It is beautiful to find such characters interesting themselves so kindly in behalf of those who are in a most helpless situation. Such was the character that the elders of the Jews give of this amiable man. Such are entered upon the records of everlasting life, as a recommendation to all who read to copy after the example of Jesus. No argument can be more powerful. It is rather extraordinary that we have several instances of such eminent characters recorded. Besides this, we have the Roman centurion, who guarded the cross on the crucifixion ; *who, when he saw the earthquake, and those things which were done, said, truly this was the Son of God.* We have also Julius the centurion, who attended Paul and the other prisoners, on their voyage to Rome. These are excellent models ; imitate them. .

## SERMON XII.

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GENESIS, xlv. 5.

*Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither : for God did send me before you to preserve life.*

THE first thing that strikes us in this history is, the simplicity of the narration, which is much more affecting than if it had been dressed up in all the pomp of language, and loaded with metaphorical expressions. striving to work up the passions to the highest pitch of feeling. Such labour serves to defeat the end intended. There is no labour here ; all is the language of nature and of truth. Judah's plea for the release of his brother Benjamin, related in the preceding chapter, lays before Joseph the engagement he came under to his father, for the safe return of his beloved son Benjamin. He begins with reminding Joseph, of what had passed between him and them at their former parting, in consequence of his enquiries concerning their father, and the obligation that they came under to bring down with them their younger brother. Next he relates what passed between them and their father, when they were prevailing upon him to

send their younger brother Benjamin with them, on their return, in order to fulfil their obligation. The parting with Benjamin, to go down to Egypt, had thrown their aged father into the greatest distress. This affecting story overcame all the firmness and resolution of Joseph ; he could no longer refrain himself before all them that stood by him. He exclaimed, *Cause every man to go out from me. And there stood no man with him, while Joseph made himself known unto his brethren. And he wept aloud : and the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard. And Joseph said unto his brethren, I am Joseph ; doth my father yet live ? And his brethren could not answer him ; for they were troubled at his presence.* This discovery is not loaded with any laboured ornament to increase the effect. This is real feeling. In the hands of some pompous orator, how would this have been debased. Scripture is distinguished by many beautiful strokes of this kind ; a strong evidence of their authenticity, and of their being dictated by the spirit of nature and of truth. And in this history in particular, we meet with many instances of this kind. The history of the creation, that subject of the greatest interest and magnificence, is thus introduced : *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.* One short sentence contains the history of this extraordinary work ; but it contains, in these few words, truths of the

greatest importance. It tells us that there is a God, and that he is the creator of heaven and of earth, and of all worlds. It tells us that the universe existed not from eternity ; that it is not the work of chance ; that it is the work of a Being of almighty power and infinite wisdom. And this declaration accords best with the dictates of right reason and sound philosophy. I might illustrate my observations with a reference to the several particulars contained in the history of creation, of the simplicity of the narration. The creation of light—of the sun, and moon, and stars—and of the creation of man. But I leave this wide field ; to enter at any length on this subject, would lead me astray from my principal design ; which is, to confine my observations to the history of Joseph. I return to what passed after discovering himself to his brethren. He hastens immediately after to relieve the distress that he saw in his brethren. *Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither : for God did send me before you to preserve life.*

I shall proceed to open out some of the interesting particulars contained in this passage. The first thing is the complete pardon that Joseph gives to his brethren, for the very great injuries that they intended, and in part accomplished towards him. He had them now completely in his power, for he was lord of all Egypt, and

none could deliver them out of his hand. He not only forgives, but he furnishes them with a principle to give ease to their minds. Here we have an instance of a great character, and of a most important duty ; a duty urged in so many instances and forms by our Lord, and exemplified also by him : and there is no duty that gives us such a clear mark of the christian character and temper, and I may say, of the heavenly temper, for in heaven there can be no resentments. The perfect and refined nature of the celestial inhabitants, can harbour no malice or grudge. Some lay great stress on the profession of the christian religion, and the acknowledging Christ before men ; but that can be done without any sacrifice : it is too often done for the sake of self interest. It gains a name among men. The profession of some particular principles, is the road to popularity, and to the favour of all those who are of the same opinion. This is a strong temptation to hypocrisy, particularly when accompanied with no urgent obligation to moral duty. This makes christians without honesty, without integrity, or charity. But the forgiveness of injuries and particularly such injuries as were inflicted on Joseph by his brethren, is the most unequivocal mark of a good man. This covers a multitude of sins. And from the very nature of man, this duty cannot be performed without the greatest exertion. But I observed, the greatest stress

is laid upon this duty by our Lord. It is laid down as an indispensable qualification to render our worship acceptable. *Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee ; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way ; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.* In the prayer he taught his disciples—*forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us.* And he exemplified this in the whole course of his life. Notwithstanding the cruel treatment he received from the Jews, he in no instance resented, though he had much in his power. In his conduct, we see his superiority over the prophets of old. When the prophet Elisha was mocked by the children, he resented it in the most severe manner : *he cursed them in the name of the Lord. And there came forth two she bears out of the wood, and tare forty and two children of them.* Our Lord was treated in the severest manner by his countrymen ; they loaded him with the most opprobrious names : he was called a gluttonous man and a winebibber. But they were not satisfied with this ; they spit upon him, they blindfolded and buffeted him ; they clothed him in mock majesty, with a purple robe, and a crown of thorns which they platted and put upon his head, and thus led him forth for the sport and derision of the people ; they insulted him on the

cross ; they called on him to come down, and they would believe on him. But he manifested no resentment ; he truly returned good for evil, and blessing for cursing. He prayed for his enemies with his last breath, and offered the only apology that could be made for them—*Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.* He manifested the same divine temper in his treatment of his friends : he punished no neglect of his disciples. When those who went to be the witnesses of his agony, overpowered with grief and deep anxiety, fell asleep, whilst he was praying and sweating as it were great drops of blood, he noticed their inattention in the most gentle manner : *What, could ye not watch with me one hour ?* But he checks that gentle reprimand, with that inimitable apology,—*The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.* In like manner does Joseph find an argument for forgiveness of his brethren. *So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God.* I might have noticed that our Lord's conduct was not imitated to the full extent by his disciples. They exercised a severe punishment on Ananias and his wife, and on Simon Magus. We learn also from Joseph, in this history, the duty and the excellence likewise of filial affection, and what beauty it confers on the character. The moment he makes himself known, he follows it up with an earnest enquiry after his father. *I am Joseph ;*

*doth my father yet live?* Time does not blot out these amiable affections; they are deeply implanted in our nature by God himself: and the prevalence of these, marks the excellence of the character. The same may we observe of the parental affection: the want of either of them, is properly regarded as what is unnatural. The parental affection is in general regarded as the most durable. The affection of children to their parents, is weakened by other affections, and of the most tender nature, interfering. Children form other connexions, which naturally take possession of their affections; as, husbands or wives, and other relative connexions; so that it is generally remarked, that the filial affections thus diffused, grow weaker and weaker: yet how unnatural and ungrateful to neglect, or to shew disrespect, to those who brought them up, that watched over and provided for them in their tender and helpless years. This can never happen in a grateful, a generous, and an excellent mind; particularly when parents have so conducted themselves, as not to give occasion for contempt or ill treatment; but have done every thing in their power for the welfare and happiness of their offspring.

Joseph shews his filial affection, by his anxious enquiries after his father. He shews it further, by his care to provide for him in his present wants; in sending for him, and placing him in



the most desirable situation in the land of Egypt ; and by the gratification he felt in introducing him to Pharaoh. He shews his anxiety and tender care for him, on his death-bed, by the general mourning ordered for him. Nothing can so much gladden the heart of a parent, as the virtues and good conduct of his children. How joyfully does the good old patriarch receive the glad tidings, that his son Joseph was yet alive, and of all his greatness and glory in the land of Egypt. The making known to Jacob the happy tidings, is in a very natural manner, and also the way in which this joyful news was received. When they first told him that his son Joseph was alive, and that he was governor of all the land of Egypt, Jacob's heart fainted, for he believed them not : then they told him all the words of Joseph ; *and when he saw the waggons which Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of Jacob their father revived : and Israel said, it is enough ; Joseph my son is yet alive : I will go and see him before I die.* This is a delightful scene, which every good parent must enjoy. It is worthy of remark, what a considerable length of time they had been separated, and yet how fresh and powerful the good affections continued. This seems to be a faint illustration of the joy that will animate the meeting of virtuous parents and children in another world. We calculate the time between

the selling of Joseph to the Midianites, and the first coming of his brethren to Egypt, to buy corn, thus :—Joseph was seventeen years of age when sold, see ch. xxxvii. 2. ; and by ch. xli. and xlvi. he was thirty, when he stood before Pharaoh ; consequently, at the time of this event, he had been thirteen years in Egypt. Now by attending to the history, it is clear that his being brought into the presence of Pharaoh, was at the commencement of the seven years of plenty. At the termination of that period, Joseph would have been twenty years in Egypt. Pharaoh, knowing his wisdom and good conduct, very properly appointed him his prime minister: making use of the absolute power with which this appointment invested him, with the greatest prudence and good management, he collected the superabundant corn of the seven plenteous years, and laid it up in granaries, to supply the deficiency occasioned by the subsequent years of scarcity, and thus became the saviour of Egypt, and of all lands. It was during the period of scarcity, that his brethren came from Canaan to Egypt, for relief in their distress ; but in what particular year of those seven, we are not told. So that it clearly appears, that Joseph had been ignorant of every thing concerning his father's family, as they also of him, for more than twenty years. But conscience remained clear and distinct in respect of the horrid crime they had commit-

ted, and the injury they had done their brother. And at the same time, his affection towards his father and his brethren continued without diminution; there remained with him no feeling of resentment. This is a pleasing picture of human nature, as it is illustrated in the behaviour of one of the best of men. Man is not, then, that vile creature, which we so often have him painted, in the random declamations of many men. The infidel disgraces his nature, by his crimes; the hypocrite, by his deceit; but an honest and good man, is the noblest work of God. It is impossible to read the simple but affecting history of Joseph, without feeling the dignity of human nature, and without giving our decided approbation of his piety, temperance, honesty, and fidelity, in the discharge of his public duty; of his brotherly and filial affection; and of the readiness with which he forgives all the injuries intended or actually committed against him. We see in him a model of that excellent spirit and temper, which actuated our blessed Lord and Master, in returning good for evil; and in his diffusing joy and happiness over a large portion of the earth, under his power and management. Let us not reject the benefit of his example, by trying to bend down our minds to those narrow and unfounded prejudices, in imputing to our nature such crimes, as lead us to refuse to continue patient in well

doing, and in adorning our nature by a life and conversation consistent with Christ's gospel.

Another exemplary part in Joseph's conduct, and which arises from our text, is referring every thing to God :—*For God did send me before you to preserve life.* Joseph's history is a striking example of God's interference in the government of this world, and his directing every thing for good. He causes the cruelty of his brethren ultimately to terminate in the happiness of Joseph. They did every thing to debase their brother. They threw him into the pit to take away his life; but the interference of Reuben prevents their putting him immediately to death: Judah then prevails upon them to lift him up out of the pit, wherein he must have perished by a cruel and lingering death: they then sold him to the Midianites, and by them he is carried into Egypt. Without recounting his different steps,—he rises to the throne of Egypt, and by his wisdom and commanding genius, he rises above Pharaoh himself. It is impossible not to discern the hand of God ordering all, and converting what his brethren meant for his ruin, to his exaltation. *Ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.* This is employed as an argument of consolation, to reconcile mankind to their allotment, under the belief that God directs all; and that all

that he appoints, must be for good. On this principle, we see God every where and in all things. Making use of this principle, is another evidence of the excellence of his heart, striving to make his brethren easy, and to alleviate the pain and remorse with which they were afflicted. But certainly, we are not warranted by reasonings of this kind, to remove guilt or responsibility from the sinner. Joseph makes an evident distinction between the actions of mankind, and the use which God makes of their actions, for bringing about good. *Ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good.* Their iniquity was still iniquity, but God prevented the mischief it was intended to accomplish. Hence we find that the reflections on their guilt, did not make them easy, though it ended in the happiness of Joseph. *We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us.* The anguish of his soul would sound in their ears till the latest moment of their lives. Even the most sincere repentance, and the deepest condemnation, could not blot out their guilt. Such would tend to make them more cautious for the future; but could not, in this case, efface what was past. There are some sins in which repentance may make reparation, as when I injure my neighbour's property,—restitution may

make reparation ; when I blast his character or reputation, I may make some amends for that also ; though I can never make myself easy at the recollection of that spirit of covetousness, which led me to encroach upon his property ; nor of that baseness, or bad temper, or irritation, which led me to such a degree of debasement, as to blast his reputation, Hence, the crimes of Joseph's brethren, could never be done away by all the grief and sorrow that they could express. Their future conduct might gain the pardon, and even the good will and friendship of the brother they had so grievously afflicted ; and this line of conduct may procure the merciful pardon and forgiveness of the Father of mercy. The contemplation of the boundless goodness and extensive care of God, in his government of the world, illustrated by this remarkable case, must produce peace of mind, and deliver us from much anxiety in the adoration of that goodness, which corrects the wickedness of man, and delivers the world, in many instances, from its consequences. What a delightful and transporting reflection, to know that God so graciously careth for us. Situated as we are amidst the weakness and wickedness of man, how consolatory to believe that the Lord God Almighty reigneth and ever interferes, not merely in the world at large, but amidst all the individuals of mankind : not only

in the government of kings and princes, but is equally attentive to the affairs of the most insignificant of men ; for great and small, the rich and the poor, are equal in his sight. What are the little, the petty quarrels of men, in the sight of Him, who governs all things in heaven and in earth? But we ought to be cautious not to think that our offences are overlooked or forgotten, because God interferes and prevents the mischief they are intended to produce. Was the crime of Judas effaced, because God had directed the consequences to the greatest good? We are answerable for every deed done in the body, notwithstanding God overrules all things for good. And we are not warranted to acquit ourselves of guilt, by referring to God as the author. In all the common affairs of life, we proceed on the direction of common sense, to judge of the actions of men by the act itself and its consequences : it is only in the affairs of religion that men confound themselves, by adopting the dark principles of predestination. You would not excuse a servant for the neglect of duty, or for the commission of crimes, by the principles of his not having it in his power to do otherwise. In all judicial proceedings, you acquit or condemn, upon the persuasion that a man has his actions in his own power. The most determined predestinarian, if seated upon the bench as judge, never forms his judgment

upon these dark principles. He assumes that man has it in his power to do good and avoid evil. The judgment that man forms of his own actions is regulated on the principles of his being a free agent. Hence the foundation of that pleasing testimony of approbation, in the faithful discharge of our duty ; and for the bitter reproaches and self-condemnation that arises from the transgression of God's law. And upon this principle, the Sovereign Judge of the Universe will proceed, in judging the world in righteousness, and in rendering to every man according to his works.

This part of history presents us with an affecting picture of the passions of men. When Joseph made himself known to his brethren, he made use of no preparation, no introduction, to the interesting act ; and this contributes much to its truth and beauty, and adds greatly to the affecting scene. It is introduced abruptly :—*I am Joseph* ; and the transition is instantaneous to that which was nearest his heart—*doth my father yet live ? And his brethren could not answer him ;* and the reason is assigned—*for they were troubled at his presence :* and well they might. This discovery must have been altogether unexpected, for they were not at all prepared. Joseph had now been to them, as one dead, between twenty and thirty years ; they parted with him in the condition of a slave, be-



reft of all power, and if ever they thought on him, and the cruelty they had been guilty of towards him, it was probably only when forced on their minds. He who now speaks to them, is invested with sovereign power, and the supreme ruler over all the land of Egypt. Previous to Joseph's making this discovery of himself, they had an opportunity of witnessing some uncommon trouble; or distress, with which he was agitated, and which he was labouring to conceal. He had ordered all that were present to withdraw; on this, *he wept aloud* to that degree, that *the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard*. Under this agony of distress, he calls out, *I am Joseph*. Human nature is the same in all ranks, in the highest as well as the lowest. It is a reflection introduced in prophane history, upon an affecting picture being presented, that they were pleased to see that they were not inattentive to the miseries of man. Scenes of joy, draw forth tears—you cannot help sharing the joy of others, and testifying your sympathy and concern by tears; and scenes of distress, call forth tears. When you receive a lost friend, and whom, perhaps, you never hoped to see more, tears of joy flow on embracing him; and when you part with a friend, who is about to remove far from you, and for a considerable period of time, tears of sorrow attend the parting scene. Other circumstances would here heighten the

event. The parting scene between Joseph and his brethren, was under circumstances of cruelty. All this is now forgotten ; here is no resentment ; all desire of revenge is banished : he receives them with tears of joy. Mankind are the same in all ages : all are partakers of joy and grief, and both arise from the same sources. There is no inversion in the order of Providence.

Taking a general view of Joseph's character, no unprejudiced person can help loving and approving of such a man ; and none but such as are bigotted to narrow and unjust principles of religion, can refuse to give their assent to the worth and excellence of human nature, and wish that they could imitate this admirable man in their life and conduct. From impartial observations of mankind, and from history, we must allow that there are many bad men—men abominably wicked ; but still, let not all suffer under a general condemnation ; for we have reason to hope and believe, that there are many most excellent men to be met with in the world, and many, of whom human nature may be proud. When we read the half-yearly calendar of felons committed for trial, we there see human nature in the most frightful and disgraceful form ; and when again we read or hear of the proceedings before the court and jury, on the trials of those criminals, we shrink back from this favourable opinion and declaration in favour of man, and

say, that *there is none righteous, no, not one*; and the particulars of the examination of the witnesses, produced in support of the prosecution and of the defence, furnish an opportunity of witnessing the false evidence, perjury, and total disregard of truth, which is too often manifested, we cannot help exclaiming—*Lord, what is man! there is not a man, who doeth good, and sinneth not.* How much, then, must we rejoice, to meet with such a character as Joseph, who reflects honour on human nature, and gives to the world such an amiable and excellent example. His character was severely tried in every way. The cruelty of his brethren, brought forth to the knowledge of the world, the fortitude, patience, filial affection, and fraternal love, of this eminent man. He comes the nearest to a perfect character, and to the Great Author and Finisher of our faith. And when Providence had placed him a situation, and given him the power and opportunity of retaliation, he, in a most eminent sense, returned good for evil. This places human nature in the most glorious and enviable situation.

There has been much dispute among men about the origin of moral evil, or of sin in the world; but however great may be the difference about these dark tenets, one thing is clear, that it is permitted and allowed by God, and that it answers many wise and good purposes, and gives

to us clear views of the perfection of the Supreme Governor, and particularly of his wisdom and goodness. It is made the instrument of good, and answers ends, which could not otherwise have been effected in the government of the world: and it also gives to us a wider display of the perfections of God, than we otherwise could have had, if man had continued in a state of perfect innocence; and it has, at the same time, opened new views of human nature, and presented the duties and conduct of man in a wider field.

Had there been no guilt in the world, we should not have known what the mercy of the Supreme Governor was, nor the extent, height, depth, length, or breadth of that mercy; nor his patience or long suffering; nor how *God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son*. Mercy, compassion, and patience, are some of the brightest jewels in the crown of our Sovereign King. The exercise of these, in his dealings with men, is one of the greatest arguments and evidences of his love. Again, the permission of sin opens a new field of exercise in the intercourse of men; and the duties and exercises founded on this permission, presents human nature in a new and more amiable point of view. We should not have known the beauty and excellence of the duty of pardoning offences, and of forgiving an enemy and doing him good.

'The parable of the good Samaritan is founded upon this principle. If we see human nature in the most odious aspect, in the cruel treatment which the unfortunate traveller met with when he fell among the thieves, we are relieved from that sight, by the benevolence and kind relief which he received from the good Samaritan, who not only dressed and bound up his wounds, but set him on his own beast, conveyed him to an inn, gave him in charge to the landlord, and pledged himself to pay every expense that might be incurred for his restoration. All this was done by the good Samaritan to a stranger, whom he had never before seen, and with whom he had no kind of connexion, either by relation, religion, or country. How lovely does human nature appear under this view, and what a lesson does this example read to the world. Let not then the religious world rant and rave against human nature in their ignorant and frothy declamations. Imitate the good Samaritan. He does honour to our nature. He gives an excellent example to christians. We have also the same principle exemplified in the history of Joseph; but we see human nature in the most forbidding aspect, in the conduct of his brethren, in the cruel usage which he received from them, in casting him into the pit, and afterwards selling him for a slave to the Midianites, who carried him down into Egypt. In the life of Joseph, we see human

nature in its excellence, in the several trials to which he was exposed, first in the house of Potiphar, afterwards in the prison, where he became the favourite of all with whom he was connected; and by his manners and most amiable disposition, he raised himself to the highest station in the court of Pharaoh. He attained the highest dignity, and to the supreme power among a people, subject to the greatest prejudices, and entertaining the greatest aversion to strangers. In all this history, we see the constant interference of the Supreme Governor. All is carried on by Him, he refers every thing to God. And, under his management, we see that he makes use of these things to draw us nearer to him, and to bring good out of evil. The Supreme Ruler has some wise and good ends in view, in permitting such actions. The great object in view, on that occasion, was to make provision for the approaching years of famine and scarcity, which was to overspread Egypt and all lands. The first step is to bless the earth with a superabundant fruitfulness, and that for seven years together; and a prudent management was required to collect and lodge in granaries these extraordinary productions. Otherwise, without this management, the corn and the fruits of the earth might have been converted into waste and extravagance, nourishing dissipation, and so perverting the plenty with

which providence had blest them, to feed the bad passions, and produce vice and every other evil act. A proper steward was to be provided, invested not only with wisdom and discretion, but with sufficient power and authority; and no character could have been found so proper as Joseph to answer all those demands. Joseph, when as yet a youth, is selected, for God knows best the dispositions and talents of men: he searches the hearts of all, and cannot be imposed upon. Besides the natural talents of prudence and discretion, God had also bestowed upon him some supernatural qualifications. He was favoured with the knowledge of what was to be the fertility of the earth, not for one year only, but for the space of fourteen years. There was to be seven years of superabundant production: the earth was to be uncommonly fruitful. And these years were to be succeeded by seven years of uncommon scarcity, so that during those years, there would be neither earing nor harvest. Now Joseph foresaw and foretold those different seasons; and this must have been made known to him, not by any peculiar knowledge of nature, but by the immediate and peculiar gift of God. Such favours he can confer for particular purposes. Other gifts of an extraordinary nature, were conferred upon him, to answer valuable ends; the knowledge of futurity, which was made known by his skill

in interpreting dreams. And this was a gift conferred upon other servants of God. Daniel was empowered to interpret dreams, and gave proofs, several proofs, of this power, on public occasions, first to Nebuchadnezzar, and afterwards to Belshazzar, his successor on the throne. Let not unbelievers rudely affect to ridicule such powers, as if impossible, and because they are not able to account for them : such powers are perfectly easy to God, who can with equal ease read the future as well as the past ; who also can read the thoughts and designs of mankind. *Known unto Him are all things from the beginning of the world to the end of time. Secret things belong unto the Lord our God : but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever.* Joseph was enabled to interpret the dreams of the butler and the baker, his fellow prisoners ; and the report of his skill in these secret things, released him from prison, introduced him to the presence and court of Pharaoh, and at last exalted him next to the throne. We may thus trace the several steps that Providence employed to deliver Joseph from troubles and dangers, from the prison, and to elevate him to the highest offices of the state, after a due course of trial and experience, to be a blessing not to Egypt alone, but to the world at large. But his excellencies consisted not in, or were limited, to these extraordinary quali-



fications : his moral qualities were equally distinguished. The great proof that he gave of the purity of his life, when in the house of Potiphar, in resisting the solicitations of his wife, caused him, by her machinations and contrivance, to be thrown into prison ; but wherever he was, God was ever with him. While in the house of Potiphar, it is said, that *the Lord was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man*. When he was removed into the prison, *the Lord was still with Joseph, and shewed him mercy, and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison. And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners that were in the prison ; and whatsoever they did there, he was the doer of it. The keeper of the prison looked not to any thing that was under his hand ; because the Lord was with him, and that which he did, the Lord made it to prosper*. And when he was removed to Pharaoh's house, from the testimony of his services, and the knowledge he had obtained of his extraordinary capacity, on receiving from Joseph the account of what was coming upon the country, respecting the years of plenty first, and of scarcity afterward to succeed ; and the conduct recommended by Joseph, to look out for a man discreet and wise, and to set him over the land of Egypt,—Pharaoh said unto his servants, *Can we find such a one as this is, a man in whom the Spirit of God is ? And*

*Pharaoh said unto Joseph, Forasmuch as God hath shewed thee all this, there is none so discreet and wise as thou art : Thou shalt be over my house, and according unto thy word shall all my people be ruled : only in the throne will I be greater than thou.* Joseph was invested with the most absolute power. On Jacob's arrival in Egypt, he found his son not only alive, but exalted to the highest pitch of glory and power, and in a station which enabled him to be the great benefactor of mankind. All countries received sustenance from Egypt ; and this accomplished by the wisdom, discretion, and good management of this most excellent man. Here he finds his son not only in the greatest power, but adorned with every virtue. Here was a fund of inexpressible joy to his aged father. All this is rendered still more interesting, by that filial love and respect, which remained still undiminished in the breast of Joseph, and of which the father is now receiving the strongest testimony, in the highly magnificent and respectable manner in which he and his whole family were now introduced into Egypt. Jacob had mourned for Joseph many years. When he heard of his death, as he supposed, *and all his sons and all his daughters, rose up to comfort him, he refused to be comforted ;* and said, *For I will go down into the grave unto my son mourning.* No wonder, then, to find such expressions of joy, as were

evinced by the good old patriarch, on his first interview with his long lost son. The history of the world furnishes no parallel to this most interesting account. We have heard of instances of joy extinguishing life ; and similar nearly to this, was the condition of Jacob.

Joseph's filial affection discovers itself in his first interview with his brethren, on their arrival in Egypt to fetch corn. He used rough language, and such as to draw from them the state of their family, and particularly of their father, for his father was ever uppermost in his heart. And this information was conveyed to him in the following language from his brethren :—*Thy servants are twelve brethren, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan ; and, behold, the youngest is this day with our father, and one is not.* Here he gets all the information he wished. Jacob, he finds, is still alive, and Benjamin, his own brother. And there is a marked but affecting reserve, when they speak of Joseph : *one is not.* This must have raised distressing feelings, which they would labour to suppress, but in vain ; these feelings were ever uppermost. This was the cause of much grief and sorrow to the father, and of much pain and remorse to the guilty brethren. Joseph was no doubt anxious to know if his father had survived that shock ; and from this information, he is satisfied that he had. When they are called upon afterwards, to speak

of the state of the family, they give it in the words their father used, after their first report :—  
*And thy servant my father said unto us, Ye know that my wife bare me two sons : and the one went out from me, and I said, surely he is torn in pieces : and I saw him not since : and if ye take this also from me, and mischief befall him, ye shall bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to the grave.* How interesting is this part of the relation, when it is remembered that all this was in the presence of Joseph, who spake to them by an interpreter, though he knew perfectly well every thing that was said. On their return from Canaan, when introduced to Joseph, we observe the anxiety, but delicacy, with which he still enquires after his father. He asked them of their welfare, and said, *Is your father well, the old man of whom ye spake ? Is he yet alive ?* Such tender enquiries reveal the true state of Joseph's affectionate anxieties about his aged father. There is in Joseph that unaffected tenderness, which breaks out on several occasions, and is an evidence of a good character. On one occasion, after he had been speaking to them, and treating them with apparent harshness, he turned himself away from them, and wept. And when his brethren returned the second time from Canaan, and Benjamin with them, *his bowels did yern upon his brother : and he sought where to weep ; and he entered into his chamber, and wept there.*

Joseph's attention to his father continued to the very last. When Jacob's death drew nigh, he sent for his son Joseph, and obliged him to swear to carry his body to Canaan, the land of his fathers, to be buried. This was a very common and natural desire, and was readily granted by this dutiful son, with the utmost cheerfulness. And again, when Jacob was sick, one told Joseph; and on Joseph's approach, it is said that the good old patriarch strengthened himself and sat upon the bed; and it was on this occasion that he blessed the two sons of Joseph, in words and manner the most solemn and affecting:—*God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God which fed me all my life long unto this day, the Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; and let my name be named on them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth.* And afterwards he blessed Joseph in the following words:—*Even by the God of thy father, who shall help thee; and by the Almighty, who shall bless thee with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lieth under, blessings of the breasts and of the womb: the blessings of thy father have prevailed above the blessings of thy progenitors unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills: they shall be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him that was separate from his brethren.*

From this interesting narration, I am led to consider the character of Joseph, as an example and recommendation of filial duty in general.

The affection of virtuous children, delights the heart of every good parent : it is a prolongation of their lives, and an extension of their happiness. The duties of children are to administer to the comfort of parents, as far as in their power. If parents are in good circumstances, and need not the help of their children for their subsistence, there are many ways of administering to their comfort, independent of this. It can be done by a tender and kind attention to them in their different concerns, falling in with their different pursuits, assisting them with their advice, humouring them in their harmless prejudices, looking after their health, and relieving them, as far as it can be done, from their troubles. But this attention is further seen and is necessary, in bearing with their tempers and humour, as far as is possible, and consistent with other duties. They may be peevish—try to remove the cause by explanations ; they may be full of complaints, they may be tedious and troublesome in their enquiries—try to remember how long and how much they bore your troublesome enquiries. They may experience some failure in their faculties, in their memories—never ridicule these. But the best consolation that children can give their parents, and which will yield them the most com-

fort, is a regular and virtuous life. This is of the most precious value—to see them treading in the paths of righteousness. The high rank, the honours and power of Joseph, could not give so much pleasure to Jacob, as his piety, wisdom, and discretion, and the readiness with which he forgave his brethren their trespasses, and the evils which they intended against him, and the pains he took to render them easy and happy. All these were the most undoubted tokens of one of the best of characters.

The history of Joseph exhibits one of the wonderful displays of the care and providence of God, watching over and raising up good men to be the instruments of diffusing extensive blessings: and an instance of the rewards bestowed upon exalted virtues. And if they be so glorious and distinguished, what may we expect to be the rewards of eminent and exemplary goodness, in Christ's everlasting kingdom.

## SERMON XIII.

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PHILIPPIANS ii. 13.

*For it is God which worketh in you both to will  
and to do of his good pleasure.*

ONE general rule should ever be observed in the interpretation of the scriptures, to resolve difficult and obscure passages by the general principles and spirit of the gospel, and not to make the whole of these principles to bend down to the sense of such detached passages. For instance, if we find any expressions that appear to stand in opposition to the justice of the Supreme Being, we should put such a construction upon them, as will reconcile these passages with that divine attribute. There are some first principles which we never can part with, nor the voice of an angel himself could oppose. Could any declaration, accompanied with the strongest evidence, ever persuade us, that God was not powerful, wise, nor good? for if we adopt sentiments contrary to these, we destroy every principle of religion, and remove the foundation of all our confidence, our hope, and our trust. To apply this rule to the words which I have read,—in what sense are we to



understand God's working in us? Certainly not in that sense which would reduce us to the condition of stocks or stones, as passive instruments, to be entirely acted upon and guided by the will and pleasure of another; and in this manner, to deaden all exertion, and to take away the principle of our being rational and accountable creatures: for unless we are capable of thinking and acting and determining for ourselves, we could not in reason and in practise, be accountable either for what we did, or what we neglected to do.

I propose then to state, in the first place, what we are to understand by God working in us, and to shew that we are so constructed, that we have powers and capacities conferred upon us by our Maker, to enable us to do what God requires of us.

God's working in us, does not imply that we are thereby incapable of ourselves to make any exertions; for the preceding words contain a command from the apostle, *to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling*; and the text is an argument and encouragement for us so to work; *For it is God who worketh in us*. If we go back to the origin of our powers and capacities, we may be truly said to do nothing without God; for he conferred upon us the powers both of body and mind. He gave us strength for our daily labours, and he gave us wisdom and under-

standing above the brute that perisheth. And he not only gave us these powers originally, but to him we owe the continuance of them. And in the faithful exercise of these powers, we expect from God his blessing. Thus, if we meditate aright on God's word and works, he can inspire into us pleasure,—great satisfaction and comfort. He can cause these exercises to produce in us the most blessed effects. Hence, the foundation and propriety of that prayer, that God would grant his blessing to our humble endeavours and labours. This is one of the ways he worketh in us. We have no right to expect the fruit without the necessary labours. In this view, we reconcile the labours of man with the blessings of God. And labour derives from hence the greatest and most powerful encouragement, if we can look forward to God's blessing, as the happiest fruit. But to say, that we can absolutely do nothing, is reducing us to the very situation of stocks and stones. And such principles are contrary to common sense,—to the common conduct of mankind, whatever their speculative principles may be; and inconsistent also with all the doctrines of the gospel.

In the first place, I feel myself able to move my hands, to walk with my feet, and to do all the things which are within the natural strength of a sound body to effect. I cannot mount up into the air, nor walk upon the deep. These

are not within the natural powers of man to accomplish. And by these common exertions, I can procure my daily bread. You would certainly laugh at any man, who should seriously deny you the exercise of these powers. I am sensible also that I can discharge the different duties of life which are required of me; and so far am I conscious of these powers, that I feel dissatisfied with myself for the omission of any of these duties. But there would be no room for dissatisfaction and self-condemnation, were I not conscious that I had power to discharge them. If we had it not in our power, we might lament our inability, but there would be no room for condemnation. Every man possessed of the means, must feel that he is not debarred by any natural inability, from feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, comforting the afflicted, and from performing a number of other kind and benevolent offices. And in our judgment of men, we never excuse them upon the point of natural inability, but we charge them with a shameful and criminal neglect. Such is the unbiassed sentiment that men in general pronounce upon the inability of man. But men fettered with absurd systems, formed in ignorance and prejudice, stand up in opposition to the natural and plain doctrines, upon the authority of some detached sentences of scripture, certainly misunderstood; and which they oppose

to the general principles of christianity, and to the natural sentiments of mankind. The darkness and obscurity in which such doctrines are involved, are strong evidences, that they cannot make a part of the religion which was designed for the instruction and benefit of the whole world, and for those poor, to whom the gospel was to be preached, and of which, plainness and simplicity was to be the leading features.

The next particular to be attended to, is, that the whole principles of the gospel, consider man a creature endowed with powers and capacities for the faithful discharge of the duties which God requires of him, and that he is an accountable creature.

The very promulgating of the gospel, and delivering it unto the world, supported by every proper evidence, implies that man is capable of hearing, attending to, and profiting by it; otherwise, it might with equal propriety be offered to the lower creatures, and even to the inanimate parts of nature. Our Saviour, in his addresses, frequently appeals to the capacities of men. *He that hath ears to hear, let him hear. Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.* And he condemns mankind, particularly the Jews, for rejecting all his invitations. This would have been highly unjust and inconsistent, unless endowed with capacities. To what purpose did

the ever blessed Jesus take so much pains in going about instructing the world, unless there was a power in man to receive instruction? Proceeding upon the other principle,—that man has no power to do any good, renders all exhortations, warnings, and intreaties, vain. Our Saviour sometimes pronounces blessings, as in his sermon on the mount, upon such and such characters, but that was totally useless, if there were none that could attend. Read the interesting representation that he gives of the solemn proceeding at the great day of the Lord, recorded in Matthew, ch. xxv., where, if we are permitted to take the obvious meaning of that passage, it assures us, that the everlasting allotment of all men will be determined by their works; and what is more worthy of our attention, than the performance of the relative duties, particularly the benevolent duties? What idea can we form of the wisdom and integrity of the Saviour of the world, if all that he asserts be a delusion, and that man hath not the smallest power in himself? What construction can we put on the parable of the talents, which proceeds directly upon the supposition of man being endowed with powers and opportunities, and where we see the different exertions of their powers, and their reward and punishment which follows accordingly? If matters be so, as those whom I am opposing, contend, the negligent servant

ought to have pleaded, Lord thou knowest that I am possessed of no power, and therefore, I can fulfil no duty. This plea would have been highly proper, and indeed unanswerable. When he places before us the tender hearted Samaritan, and the hard hearted priest and Levite, why are we naturally led to approve of the Samaritan, whilst at the same time we condemn the priest and the Levite for their neglect and want of feeling? But we are wrong, if men have no power or natural goodness; and the opinion and judgment of mankind in general, are wrong, who have proceeded on the same principles. Besides, how are we to understand the solemn assurances which we have delivered to us, upon the most interesting of all subjects; *That God hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness*: and, *that men shall be judged according to their works*. There can be no justice in condemning, if man has no power. Horrid thought! to charge our Maker with wickedness! There is no evading this conclusion. Men may quibble and puzzle themselves and others with attempts to unravel such absurdities, but the common sense of mankind must ever condemn such principles and dark tenets, which involve men in such difficulties. But I may appeal not only to the doctrines and principles of revelation, but to the common conduct of men, even to those who support these

tenets, who believe and contradict them through the whole course of their lives. Upon what principles do we exhort our children to attend to their different duties, both social and religious, but the belief that they have it in their power? for when we deliver to them such instructions, we never call their power in question. We exhort them to be dutiful to their parents and superiors, to avoid bad company, to speak the truth always, to be honest and kind to all. We exhort them to remember their creator, not to take God's name in vain, to remember the sabbath day, to read and hear the scriptures. And further, if they neglect any of these duties and commands, we not only reprove them, but they subject themselves to correction and punishment. But this is certainly the grossest injustice, if they have no ability. The want of ability has never been yet offered as an apology for the neglect of duty, or the transgression of God's law. We may apply the same to servants and masters, to husbands and wives, and to all ranks and degrees of men.

But this is not all; the whole law of this land, and all lands, is founded upon this principle. With what propriety would a criminal at the bar plead in his defence, that he had no power to act otherwise: that he could do nothing of himself, and God was not pleased to work in him? Would any court, any judge, or any jury, listen

to that plea? and yet if the principle be true, that man has no power, it is a plea founded on the best ground possible. In short, go over the whole of human life, and all its relations and connections,—they all speak this language,—that man is endowed by his Creator, with sufficient powers and abilities to do the will of God; and that therefore, he is an accountable creature,—answerable for his conduct; answerable to the courts of justice, for the transgression of human laws; and answerable to his Maker, for all the deeds done in the body. The gospel carries this principle to its full extent; that our account is to be in proportion to our talents, that is, to our powers and abilities; and *to whomsoever much is given, of him much is required*; and that *it would be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah, and for Tyre and Sidon, in the day of judgment, than for those nations which are favoured with the gospel, yet do not conform to it in their lives.*

Whenever men separate the gospel from common sense and reason, we meet with nothing but absurdities. Human reason and the gospel speak uniformly the same language, for they proceed from the same source.

But in support of this system, it is contended, that we can merit nothing from our Maker; and that man can merit from his Maker, is held up as the worst of all heresies. But can we not



suppose a race of creatures similar to man, having the same powers and weaknesses, placed in the very situation in which man is, by his Maker,—would it be any thing improper to believe and teach, that the man who acts well in this situation, and likewise strives to please that Great Being who placed him there, will meet with his approbation and reward? This would not be lessening either the mercy or kindness of God. It would be no insult or affront to his Supreme Majesty. God is not possessed of such petty jealousy towards his rational creatures, as to suppose that the encouragements which he gives to his servants would be the means of their taking to themselves the glory of the Creator. Nor does he expect from man the perfect services of angels. But he who acts up to his nature, and does his best to please his Creator, will not fail to receive at last that final approbation pronounced by our Saviour,—*Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.* He will receive the same approbation as that of the pure spirits, who continually stand before his throne. The Judge of all the earth will do right. He will make all gracious allowance for the weaknesses of his creatures, and for the strength of the temptations with which they have been surrounded. In the passage before quoted, we see the righteous meeting with the approbation of the Sovereign Judge, and that

upon the principle of their own actions. Now give to this any name you please,—approbation or merit,—it is of no consequence, if God has declared that such a course of life shall meet his approbation, and that the opposite course shall meet with his severe condemnation: this is sufficient. Let us not be frightened by names, from encouraging man in the faithful discharge of his duty. But there is another argument used on such occasions, to decry and to discourage good works. It is for the sake of exalting the sovereign grace of God, in opposition to the works of man. They assert that you can do nothing of yourself; not a good action; not so much as to think a good thought, nor to form a good wish; that all our good works are only splendid vices. In the first place, they plunge man into the most deplorable state imaginable,—shapen in iniquity, and conceived in sin; and able to do nothing to extricate himself from this state. As he can do nothing, he must perish everlastingly, unless God interferes to raise him up. Placed in this helpless and hopeless situation, man is certainly not a fit object for punishment, if he fails in his imperfect endeavours. The Supreme Being is represented as choosing one, and passing by another, without any merit in the one, or fault in the other; and those that are saved, are saved by sovereign grace. You can scarcely form a more complete

picture of capricious tyranny, than is given in this statement. Man is placed in the deepest depravity, without any fault or offence on his part. He is born in that condition, he is commanded to do what he cannot do, let him be ever so diligent and industrious, in seeking to avoid evil, and pursue good. No matter, he must perish, unless he be among those few whom God has selected from all eternity, to everlasting life. And is this grace? Is it possible that any man can think seriously on the greatest and best of Beings, and entertain such conceptions of him? We are commanded to love him with all the powers and affections of the heart; but is it possible for us to love him if we believe such doctrines? The affections of the human heart cannot be compelled by any arbitrary command, without perceiving a being that would oppress you with fear and horror; but love must arise from the amiable conceptions which we entertain for the objects of our affections. We must conceive God as possessed of all perfections, and particularly of the amiable moral perfections,—just, impartial, no respecter of persons, and infinitely good. Could we love him, if we believed him to be partial, and in his dealings with mankind, not regulated by any principle of justice, exalting one to the highest degree of favour, without any merit on his part, and plunging others into the deepest gulf of

misery, without any crime or omission? How can we trust in him, or resign ourselves to his disposal? *God is love!* yes, God must be love, because he is the best; and the more we know the more must we love him. But this is not the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has been represented above. There is nothing that can tend so much to the increase of infidelity, as such representations of the Supreme Being. It would be difficult to persuade a man possessed of reason, to embrace a system of this kind. Atheism is a more reasonable doctrine than their system, which gives to us such a representation of the Supreme Being, arguing that he is not good, that he is partial, &c. There are some speculative principles that are not worth contending for,—for such I should never dispute, for however decided, they can have very little effect upon our hopes, our comfort, or our practice. But there are principles, I do not say that they actually are, but which we may suppose to be, that no evidence could prevail upon me to receive,—such as, that God is not almighty, nor infinitely wise nor good. These principles would banish all religion,—could yield no comfort, but would make men miserable. Were men desirous of banishing all hope and comfort from the world, they could not do it so completely as by establishing such doctrines. Where is the advantage that the man

who labours honestly in the discharge of his duty, hath over the profligate villain, if such should be the religious state established in the world? For if you trust to works, and hope to gain any thing by them, you are in the high road to misery. But there are no sins too great, no life too impure, no offences too aggravated, to find mercy; if only you believe, all will be well. And men are taught at the same time, that there are no conditions required, no terms to be made; or in the cant language of some of their leaders, no *ifs* and *ands*, only believe; or as it is sometimes said, only come to Christ. And as to even this last condition, likewise, you are told you cannot believe of yourself, you cannot come to Christ of yourself. Is it possible to collect together such a heap of contradictions and absurdities, and impose them on the world, on the common sense of mankind? What insults to reason and religion! How much must it puzzle the plain christian, to digest such doctrines. But men are prepared beforehand for this part: they are not to make use of their reason, in judging of such things; they are to surrender reason, and adopt as their guide something for which they have got a name, but no more—it is *faith*, but it is a peculiar faith. There is a faith founded upon reason, believing upon evidence, which you can understand; but this is not the faith of the superstitious, or the

faith of the fanatic. We are exhorted to assign *a reason for the hope that is in us*. In the common mode of preaching, there are no people who deal so much in the terrible, as their preachers; they bring forth all the horrors of hell, to rouse their hearers: but how ridiculous is the labour, if men have no power to believe. You may terrify them to assent, but this cannot be believing; it is that faith which they can only produce; and it is that faith which another may destroy by terror. Such doctrines are the most powerful discouragements to a good life, and to every christian duty: they hold out every motive to the wicked to continue and to persevere in the evil of their ways, by assuring them that whenever they choose, they may break off their sins, and come to Christ, and they will be cordially received. No religion can be better calculated for the dishonest, for the adulterer, for the highwayman, for the profligate, and for villains of every description. The deeper they sink in sin, the more welcome; and the greater honour does he gain who calls them to repentance: the more profligate, the fitter for receiving mercy. These doctrines deaden every virtuous exertion, and render men totally indifferent to their lives; and it may be added, that all preaching is useless—that all writing is useless, and that it is to no purpose that Christ came into this world *to seek and to save that which was lost*,

for man has no more power than the stock or the stone. Thus the most complete system of fatalism is established in the world, and man is a mere machine. Doctrines of this kind do much more harm than deism, or even atheism itself. For this fanaticism is acknowledging a God, a providence, and a future state; but that God whom you worship, gives to you a system which encourages the worker of iniquity; and the Great Teacher, his only beloved Son, gives hopes to sinners to come to him when they are disposed and find it convenient, not immediately to forsake their sins, only to take care to come before they die, and an assurance, that no degree of wickedness shall prevent them from being accepted: come at what hour they please, they shall be sure of mercy. What encouragement! Remember also, that good works are of no value. What dependance can you have on a man of these principles? To-day he may be the vilest of sinners; to-morrow, the purest of saints. Can any person who has the least knowledge of human nature, have the least confidence in such characters, or believe that a man can change his nature, his habits, his inclinations, with the same ease and readiness that he can change his coat? *Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, who are accustomed to do evil.* The deist is often a man of principle; he has principles of honour; and so

also is the atheist. In general, you would depend much more on their promise or word, than on that of the fanatic.

But to return to the text. I maintain that there is no contradiction between the precept—*work out your own salvation with fear and trembling*, and the encouragement, *for it is God that worketh in you to will and to do of his own good pleasure*. This encouragement, by no means, amounts to saying, that God does every thing for you, and that you can do nothing for yourself; the contrary is evidently implied, by the connection between the two parts. It is the strongest encouragement to duty, and serious and strenuous duty, to be persuaded that your labours shall not be fruitless, for they shall meet with the approbation of God, and the best encouragement possible from Him, by assisting you in your labours, by blessing them, and giving you success. This encouragement is not confined to our religious duties; it runs through the common duties of life, by blessing our labours and giving them success. What expectation could the husbandman have of a joyful crop, if, instead of plowing, and sowing, and harrowing, and all at the proper season, he should fold his hands in idleness, and give himself up to inactivity and sloth, trusting that God would cause the earth to yield spontaneously for the supply of man. What should we think of that



man in common life, who should argue upon this most preposterous principle? The duty of the husbandman is to cultivate the ground, upon the principle that reason and experience point out. Watching also the proper season for the different labours, for sowing and for reaping; and upon this principle you may expect that God will bless your labours. However, after you have done your best, you may with confidence commit your cares to God. He may be said now to do all for you. To Him you look up to open the clouds of heaven, to send down his fertilizing rain. It is his sun that sends forth heat and life to the vegetable, as well as the animal world. We can do none of these things for ourselves; and unless these things be done for us, we can have no success. We may truly say, then, we can do nothing without God. And in this sense, we come at the true and most rational meaning of the text, as it is illustrated by its application to one of the most important affairs and duties of common life. We see, then, that in every year, and in every season, we are totally dependant on God. We may illustrate this still further, by applying it to other things, and to one of the most momentous affairs of life, both respecting ourselves, our families, and society at large; and that is, the instructing and educating of our children, and training them up to become useful and respectable in the world;

in taking care of their health, we may do every thing in our power, in directing them to proper courses, in regulating their food and their exercises ; and not only in directing them, but at proper times and occasions, by our advice on the one hand, and enforcing of duties, and on the other, by necessary restraints. There is not a more important duty in life, and none that requires greater care to carry forward, and numberless exertions are required to accomplish it ; for there are comprehended in it not only instruction, direction, and care, to train them up in the way they should go, but along with these we must infuse into them good principles, habits, and manners. A successful plan of this kind is of the greatest importance, and failure is a great misfortune, as regarding not only the individual himself, but the family with which he is connected, and society at large. For the executing this part, we may do all we can, but who can command success ? In that part which is of the highest importance, the health of our children, how little have we in our power—almost nothing. As it respects our own health, how much depends on God ; little indeed can man do in this particular. And in many other parts, we must be equally unsuccessful and unfortunate : we must leave almost every thing, and rely on God. When we take a serious view of the difficulties of the task we are undertaking, we become stupified :

God alone can effect all. Commit your cares to him ; he is the great agent and director. He can watch over and guide and preserve, by ways and means of which we are all ignorant. But would it not be absurd to say, we can do nothing in matters of this kind ; God must do all for us. Should we not in some cases greatly blame ourselves, if by our carelessness, or foolish indulgence, we should allow our children to follow courses which ruin their health and comfort ? We severely blame ourselves ; and conduct of this kind must be matter of lasting regret. This regret, and these severe reproaches and self-condemnation, are evidences that we can do many things. But God directs and superintends all. It is one of the first duties of a parent, and the master of a family, to provide his family with food and raiment, and this he must do by labouring with his hands, if placed in a subordinate rank of life, or by exerting the talents and means in his power, of whatever nature and degree they may be. But here again, he must look up for the blessing and assistance of heaven. Much of his success must depend upon the continuance of his health, but that he cannot command : all this is in the power of God. But men sometimes, with the best health and the most assiduous labour, cannot command success. In the affairs of this world, *the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong ; nor yet bread to the wise, nor riches*

*to men of understanding, nor favour to men of skill ; but time and chance happen to them all.* We see the slothful, the negligent, and the stupid, often succeed in the world ; while the industrious, and men of capacity and talents, miscarry. This is an evidence of the interference of a Superior Power in the government of the world, and speaks to us—*Let him that glorieth, glory in the Lord.* But at the same time, we have no right to expect success, without diligence, and the use of the means, though the final result depends on God. One thing, however, we ought to observe, that in the things of this world, we see how unable man is to command success. But in things where our moral character is concerned, where our real improvement is at stake, men have still more in their power ; and much more depends on their own diligence and application. Hence the propriety of *working out our own salvation with fear and trembling.*

## SERMON XIV.

## ACTS iv. 13.

*Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.*

HERE we have an instance of the good effects produced by good principles and a good life. They give confidence and courage. A miraculous cure was performed by Peter, upon a man lame from his mother's womb. This excited great alarm among the rulers of the Jews, lest it should occasion the spread of the gospel. For after the performance of this great cure, Peter embraced the opportunity of preaching unto them Jesus, and that by faith in his name, this man was made strong. *And as they spake unto the people, the Priests and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them.* This opposition could not prevent the effects of this address, for it is said, the apostles were thrust into prison, and next day brought before the high priest. A question was put to them, and they boldly avowed their principles, and in such a manner, as to set at defiance all their

power. *Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.* The manner in which they spake, could not fail to create much wonder, especially when they knew that they were unlearned, and in a private capacity, which is the meaning,—to account for it, *they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.* Among other things, this may mean, that they had learned of him. This will give me an opportunity of placing before you one of the benefits which Christ's religion confers on those who have truly imbibed its principles, and it may particularly apply to those who have testified their adherence to him, by commemorating his death and sufferings, and by publishing to the world, that they are his real disciples. It inspires them with the spirit of courage, and this must be the effect upon good men in general.

First: I shall illustrate this, by stating the effects which such principles must naturally produce; and strengthen the argument by a reference to some of the facts recorded in holy writ. On the entrance on this first part, I must state a precaution,—that we are not to expect that a firm belief of the principles of religion, will subdue the natural fear of death. Vague and positive assertions of this kind, are belied by

the general experience of mankind, and hence they deceive our expectations, and create a distrust in the other promises of the gospel. And the reason is plain; our faith is and must be imperfect, and our courage is imperfect. *We see here as through a glass, darkly.* We see the future world through the present, overspread with mists and clouds. The best of men feel and must acknowledge this. And from the nature of things, it must be expected. Clear views of heaven would disqualify us for the present life. But the principles of the good man, have a natural and direct tendency to produce courage, and of course, have an infinite advantage over the condition of the wicked. His principles produce no resolution, no courage, no hope, no comfort, and no joy. The principles of the true christian cause him to regard God as his protector, his portion, and his everlasting reward: and wherever he is, he is in the presence of his heavenly Father. If he live, he has God for his protector, and if he die, he falls into his everlasting arms. The belief of a Providence is an encouraging principle, in whatever situation of life we may be placed. What would this world be if there was no Providence? The belief of a future state inspires courage, for if the good man dies in the midst of his duty, he is not lost. His removal is to a state of greater perfection and happiness. The christian has no

promise of being exempted from death, or from the miseries of life ; in this respect, all things come alike to all. But it is a source of the highest consolation, that afflictions are the appointment of our Heavenly Father ; that they spring not from the dust, but are appointed by Him who is possessed of infinite wisdom and goodness, and in many cases are intended for our improvement. *Whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth.* We see good men are often subject to the greatest trials. Under the Old Testament dispensation, Job was sorely afflicted, and his trials were of the severest kind. Daniel, a most excellent and exemplary character, was severely tried ; he was thrown into a den of lions. The three Hebrew children were condemned to be cast into a fiery furnace. Joseph underwent one of the severest trials ; and it was a great aggravation, that his own brethren were his persecutors ; and he suffered for his integrity afterwards, when he was brought into Egypt ; but God was with him, and so overruled his sufferings, that they ended in joy and triumph. The Great Author and Finisher of our faith, was made perfect through sufferings. These are evidences, that afflictions are not the marks of God's displeasure : they are intended to purify our nature, and on some occasions, to cure those evils which prosperity could not cure. Looking therefore at these bright examples, is to encourage



us to follow after their steps. The same God who watched over and delivered his servants of old, will ever watch over and protect good men in their duty. His hand, on common occasions, may not be so visible : he may not quench the violence of the fire, nor stop the mouth of the lion, nor send his angels to conduct us, but he may preserve us in a manner equally as perfect. He may make use of means to avert the danger ; he may suggest some thought to us, which may be of the greatest importance. If proceeding in a path where there is some danger, he may employ some means or motive to give a turn to our course. Often do we hear of instances of very narrow escapes from danger ; instances of people having just quitted a house, and soon after it has fallen : there is no visible hand, but his interference may have been full as direct. The ways of Providence are wonderfully mysterious. If, therefore, we have a firm faith in this interference, and live habitually under the persuasion *that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens*—we have nothing to fear, whatever may occur. The belief of a future world, delivers us from much anxiety on our own account, and on account of our family and friends. 'This is the enlivening principle reserved for those who believe in and acknowledge Christ.

Further : A good life has a natural tendency to produce courage. Guilt makes a coward of man : an evil conscience makes man dread death, and consequently danger. That maxim is ever found true—*The wicked flee when no man pursueth : but the righteous are bold as a lion.* Felix trembled when Paul preached. The subjects on which he discoursed, were such as a good man must approve,—*Righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come* : these support the dignity of our nature. A wicked man has many things to create fear ; he must feel that he cannot be the object of love ; and his life, in many cases, renders him the object of fear and detestation. This makes a man a coward ; and he must be sensible that he cannot be approved of by his God. Besides reflections on his past life, and reflect often he must, his conduct excites remorse and fears ; and cases and circumstances often occur, to call forth such feelings. They often come upon him by surprise and unawares ; and frequently when other distresses occur, these increase the distress. When the brethren of Joseph are in the greatest trouble, on account of the severe questions put to them by the man who was the governor and lord of the land of Egypt, their guilt rouses their apprehensions, and brings forcibly to their recollection, the cruel deed they had committed against their brother. *They said one to another, we are verily guilty*

*concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear ; therefore is this distress come upon us.* An accusing conscience is the worst companion in the day of trial, and there is no fleeing from this accuser, go where we will : such a companion unmans us ; there is no supporting coolness or courage. Upon much firmer ground does the good man stand. View the apostles : they were arraigned, they had the whole weight of the Jewish rulers against them ; but armed with good principles, a good cause, and a good life, they set all at defiance ; with an undaunted courage, they avow their principles, and confound all their enemies. And this leads me in pursuit of what I proposed, to support this argument by evidences and examples from the scripture.

Beginning with Moses : of him it is said, *when he was come to years, he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter ; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season ; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt : for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward. He forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king.* And we see in all his intercourse with Pharaoh, he sets his power at defiance ; and however much he might be offended, yet he dares not to lay

hands on Moses : he was under the protection of Him by whom kings reign, and his will cannot be resisted. This is a decisive instance of that courage which good principles and a good cause inspire. We have a striking instance of the means which God employs to preserve his servants in the day of danger, in his deliverance of Mordecai, and the whole nation of the Jews. The wicked Haman, by vile arts and insinuations, had prevailed upon Ahasuerns, to destroy Mordecai, and all the people of the Jews. In the third chapter of the book of Esther, we read, *Letters were sent by posts into all the king's provinces, to destroy, to kill, and to cause to perish, all Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day*, through his extensive dominions, from India to Ethiopia, over one hundred and twenty-seven provinces. The posts, it is said, were hastened by the king's commandment. But what are all the resolutions and decrees of men, when in opposition to the will of heaven, Hear what a simple appointment of the Almighty defeats all these extensive, deep laid, and bloody schemes of man. At the conclusion of this plan, it is said, that *the King and Haman sat down to drink ; but the city Shushan was perplexed*, No armies were provided ; no insurrections of the people were raised to defeat this horrid plan, But, in the sixth chapter, we read—*On that night could not the king sleep ; no wonder : and for*

his amusement, *he commanded to bring the book of records of the chronicles ; and they were read before the king. And it was found written, that Mordecai, by giving information, had defeated a conspiracy to murder king Ahasuerus, and that no reward had been given him. Mordecai is sent for, and this leads to the disclosure of the horrid decree for the murder of the Jews. Orders are issued to put a stop to it : the Jews are preserved ; and Haman is ordered to be hanged on that gallows he had erected for Mordecai. Glory to God, whose providence watches over his faithful servants. This history, founded on fact, illustrates the management of Providence, in the government of the world, and shews what simple means he employs to effect his mighty works ; and furnishes motives and principles for hope and courage to his faithful servants. Mordecai is an instance. We have another example of the courage of good men in danger, and of deliverance granted, Dan. ch. iii. in those three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, eminent for their rank and station, but more so for their firmness in duty. Nebuchadnezzar, in his rage, had commanded the most dreadful punishment to be inflicted on these men, because they refused to bow down and worship the golden image which he had set up.—Read Dan. iii. from v. 13 to 19. In ch. vi. we meet with another instance of the exalted courage which a good*

cause and good principles do inspire. A conspiracy was formed against Daniel, founded not upon any disaffection in him to Darius the king, *forasmuch as he was faithful, neither was there any error or fault found in him.* And the conspirators bear this honourable testimony—*We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God.* 'This interesting history, we have, Dan. ch. vi. 6. These presidents and leading men, laid a snare to entrap the king, and thereby induced him to form a decree to ruin Daniel. In order to accomplish this, they flatter the king with the resolution which they had framed—*That whosoever shall ask a petition of any God or man for thirty days, save of thee, O king, he shall be cast into the den of lions.* 'They were so successful in their plan, that Darius signed the writing and the decree. *Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime.* Whereupon, the men who urged the king to make this decree, come to him, as if surprised, and relate what they had heard. What a change! *The king was sore displeased with himself, and set his heart on Daniel to deliver him.* But at the same time, he commanded that they should cast Daniel

into the den of lions; adding, in distress of mind—*Thy God whom thou servest continually, he will deliver thee.* Here is an instance of a man, a powerful prince, acting contrary to his feelings, in this unjust and cruel command, but at the same time adhering to his religious principles. And the deliverance granted to this eminent and courageous servant of God, is a strong instance of the care of Providence interfering in a miraculous manner, for the preservation of good men. And it gives us great ground to believe, that he is equally present in the government of the world in all common events, though this interference is not visible to us. How consolatory and cheering to believe that the God whom we serve continually, will preserve and deliver us in the day of danger. What peace and comfort does this principle inspire, and what fortitude in the discharge of our duty.

To this, I shall only add another instance of the courage of good men, and their deliverance in the hour of danger. We meet with this in the Acts, ch. xvi., in the account of Paul and Silas, who healed the damsel possessed with the spirit of divination. They effected this, not by any tedious process, but by the simple command of the apostle Paul, who thus addressed the spirit: *I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.* And he came out the same hour. Her masters finding that all their

hopes of gain were gone, entered a complaint before the magistrates, who ordered Paul and Silas, after having laid many stripes upon them, to be cast into prison. The gaoler, perhaps from his naturally savage temper, or from his zeal in the cause, or actuated by both, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks. But neither insults, stripes, nor savage confinement, could break the spirits or daunt the courage of these excellent men. The first thing we read concerning them, is—*At midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God : and the prisoners heard them. And suddenly* (it is continued) *there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken : and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed.* We might have inferred that this earthquake ought not to be interpreted as any thing miraculous; that it arose from natural causes, for such things are common in that quarter of the world. But connect it with the circumstances that precede, and the effects that follow—*Paul and Silas prayed, &c.* This is not a common thing under such circumstances. Then the effects follow—the *foundations of the prison were shaken : and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed.* It was natural enough that the prison should be shaken, but not so natural that all the doors should be opened, and still less na-



tural that all their bands should be loosed. And we may easily guess the terror that must have seized all, but particularly those who were most concerned in the savage treatment of the apostles. What would be the condition of the masters of the damsel, and of the magistrates who ordered the apostles to be punished? We shall soon see what effect these wonders of nature had upon the gaoler, who had *thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks.* The keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, dreaded the consequences to himself:—*He drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled. But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, do thyself no harm: for we are all here. Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, and brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?* It adds greatly to the excellence of this narration, that the circumstances are crowded one upon another. In a few lines, what information, interesting information; is given! Here is an instance of a sudden change brought about in this person; from a violent persecutor of Jesus Christ, and his faithful servants, he becomes a zealous believer. But the change passed not merely on his principles, but on his manners, his temper, and his life. He who, in the early part of the

night, treated the apostles with the most savage cruelty, *took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes ; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway. And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.* Here is a sudden change, and upon the best principles ; a complete change takes place in his temper, and this with the greatest satisfaction to himself : he rejoices. This is the best evidence of the divine life. May we not then apply to them, what is said of the apostles in the text,—*They took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus.* So that along with the courage which is the evidence of good principles and a good life, we may regard joy as another criterion of true religion. Our Lord was no enemy to the innocent enjoyment of life. Religion lays the firmest foundation for joy. Our Saviour says to his disciples, at the very time when his own sufferings were fast approaching, in his consolatory discourse to them,—*Let not your hearts be troubled ; ye believe in God, believe also in me.* The belief in God is a solid source of joy ; and this when it is united with the belief of a future state, as it is in this consolatory exhortation :—*In my Father's house are many mansions ; and, I go to prepare a place for you : and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself ;*

*that where I am, there ye may be also.* In the course of this beautiful discourse, he throws in many expressions of joy. *Ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy, no man taketh from you.* These are all the words of truth and soberness, strictly argumentative, and built upon an everlasting foundation. To believe in God, is the source of unspeakable satisfaction and joy. It gives us the greatest source of hope in this world, and enables us to look up with comfort, to the world which is to come. What pleasure, to be assured that all events are directed by infinite wisdom and goodness,—if we are in trouble and difficulties, we know that God can overrule all things for good, and that when we are removed from the present state, we are still with God, for he is equally present in every part of the universe, and that even death does not remove us from his presence; it only carries us to that abode, where we shall see him more clearly, and enjoy his presence in a more perfect world; and where we shall experience none of those doubts and apprehensions, with which we must be frequently and unavoidably distressed here below. *Now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face;* and where we shall be delivered from all uncertainties. Believe in God, and *rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.* But our Saviour, in the above exhorta-

tion, on which I have founded these remarks, exhorts us to believe also in himself. These chapters, in which they are contained, I ever regard as the most excellent in the New Testament, as containing the most delightful doctrines and precepts of Jesus Christ. They speak home to the best affections of the human heart, so that when we read them with attention, we cannot help exclaiming, *Never man spake like this man.* The beauty, simplicity, and plainness, in which they are delivered, are a specimen of genuine eloquence,—not that eloquence which consists in pompous words and declamations, often dark and mysterious—but easy and unaffected: and this is one of the arguments for their divine original. They make known to us the Father in spirit and in truth. The character of our Lord inspires us with joy. His piety is a proof of his *coming from God, and going to God again.* His active and benevolent life, produces the same conclusion,—going about constantly doing good to all the sons and children of men. His example also of some of his most difficult duties, not only his kindness to his friends, (for this is an easy and natural duty), but his readiness to pardon offences, and to do good to enemies; and these examples were evident and convincing; not affected, but genuine and sincere: his forgiveness of injuries, were not with any interested views, but the unaffected effusion of the heart.

Who can doubt this, when you hear him breathing forth—*Father forgive them, for they know not what they do ?*

But I must leave this subject, and turn for a few minutes to the history of the eunuch, recorded in the Acts, ch. viii. Philip, by the direction of the Spirit, was going along the road from Jerusalem to Gaza. While proceeding on his way, he fell in with *a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem to worship, and was now returning, and sitting in his chariot reading Esaias the prophet.* The passage he was reading, was one highly interesting and affecting,—it was the prophecy of the sufferings and death of Christ,—*He was led as a sheep to the slaughter ; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth : in his humiliation his judgment was taken away : and who shall declare his generation ? for his life is taken from the earth.* And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, *I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this ? of himself, or of some other man ?* Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus. This must certainly have been a most excellent sermon, as it wrought a complete conviction in the heart of this man, who seems to have been a sincere inquirer after the truth,

and here meets with an excellent opportunity for his satisfaction. Being fully desirous of embracing the faith of Christ, he openly acknowledged his conviction, and expressed his earnest desire of being baptized, to which Philip consented, upon condition of his believing with all his heart; to which the eunuch most readily assented, with this devout reply,—*I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing.* Here then is one of the blessed fruits of genuine religious joy. It is expressive of that state of mind which arises from complete satisfaction on a point deemed to be of the highest importance. An anxious student experiences great joy when he meets with a satisfactory solution on some point of philosophy; but of how much inferior interest is this, to the question which so deeply engaged the researches of this great man. What joy must the weary traveller feel when he experiences the knowledge of everlasting happiness, who before was enveloped in the darkness of night, in a path beset with dangers and difficulties; what joyful emotions must arise in his breast, when day-light breaks upon him, and

the glorious sun shines forth in all his majesty and brightness, and points out to him the safe path in which to proceed. But this comparison is far below the state of him who is bewildered in the darkness of ignorance, idolatry, and superstition. When the Sun of Righteousness arises on the world, and when he is especially directed to this anxious traveller, we can find no expression for that joy and delight which now illumines his mind. He had before got some light which directed him to the holy scriptures for his guide, but now his light is completed, and there is no darkness in his path. *The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.*

The first general reflection that I have to offer is, that Christ's religion has the direct tendency to make man both respectable and happy. No man can command more respect than the apostles, when called upon to plead for themselves or their religion. Felix trembled at the voice of Paul, when *he reasoned on righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come.* He was placed before Felix to defend himself, but the judge and the prisoner seemed to have changed places: Felix said to him—*Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.*—But that season never came. Agrippa was almost persuaded to be a christian. Peter and John set their judges at

defiance, and ask,—*Whether, it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.*

Again: In the Old Testament, you see the high ground on which the prophets stood, looking down upon kings and princes. How admirable does Daniel appear, when Darius, after spending a night in great anxiety on his account, *arose very early in the morning, and went in haste unto the den of lions. And when he came to the den, he cried with a lamentable voice unto Daniel: and the king spake and said to Daniel, O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions? Then said Daniel unto the king, O king, live for ever. My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt. And after ordering vengeance to be executed on those who had misled him, king Darius issued a decree, That in every dominion of my kingdom, men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel: for he is the living God, and stedfast for ever, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed, and his dominion shall be even unto the end.* No greater evidence can be found, of the high respect which true goodness can command.

Secondly: Religion best prepares men for every change of fortune, and all the varying



scènes of life: it furnishes consolation under trials and adversity, and checks the intemperance of prosperity, by recalling us to the uncertainty of life, and our sole dependance on God.

Thirdly: Religion is favourable to the social duties. We see both Daniel, and the apostles of our Lord, shewed proper respect to men in authority; they gave honour to whom honour is due. When Darius, with a lamentable voice, enquired of Daniel in the den of lions—*Is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions?* Daniel, according to the courtesy of those times, replies, *O king, live for ever.* Again, when called upon to interpret the dream of Nebuchadnezzar, he prefaced it with saying—*My lord, the dream be to them that hate thee, and the interpretation thereof to thine enemies.* The apostles of our Lord, evinced the same respect to rank and distinction. Paul, before Felix, addresses him, in his defence, observing the same rules of good breeding, and I may add, of the common language of men. *Forasmuch as I know that thou hast been of many years a judge unto this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself.* And before Agrippa—*I think myself happy, king Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself, &c.* Our Lord set the example. Hence, I cannot see that Christ's religion calls upon us to avoid the common forms of speech; these soften, and render intercourse more pleasing.

## SERMON XV.

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LUKE xxii. 61.

*And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter.  
And Peter remembered the word of the Lord,  
how he had said unto him, before the cock crow,  
thou shalt deny me thrice.*

I HAVE made choice of these words, rather than the parallel passage from Matthew, because there is a circumstance related here, that Matthew does not mention, and a circumstance of great importance in the history of Peter's restoration ; it is,—*That the Lord turned and looked upon Peter.* This circumstance is recorded, not only as a powerful instrument to lead Peter to repentance, but to bring us acquainted with an affecting particular in Peter's denial of him ; that it was not done in a secret manner, in low whispers, but in the very presence and hearing of Jesus, when standing as a malefactor before the tribunal of men. It is an interesting particular, and well worthy of being preserved and recorded, by the historians of the life of Christ. We can easily conceive the posture in which our Lord stood, from the simple narration ; with his back towards Peter, and his face towards his judges ; treated by the powers of this world as

a blasphemer, as the vilest of malefactors, smitten even in the presence of his judges, without rebuke or punishment; a melancholy proof of the people's universal treatment of the ever-blessed Jesus, and of the wretched policy of the government, which afforded no protection to the miserable, or against injustice. Whilst this is passing, he has to sustain a more afflicting distress, to hear his own disciple, who had so lately vowed, in the strongest terms, his inviolable fidelity and adherence, now loudly protesting, and with cursing and swearing,—*I know not the man*. This is permitted, till Peter's shame and guilt are manifested; then the cock crew for the second time, as a signal of the completion of his guilt, and as an evidence of the perfect knowledge that Christ had of futurity. *And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter*.

Let us now accompany him in the history of his restoration, and to the circumstances that brought him back to the acknowledgment of Christ. The first circumstance, is the crowing of the cock. The other evangelists, who take no notice of the turning of our Lord, and his affecting look, mention this as the first circumstance that awakened Peter to recollection. We may consider them both as having their effect, and therefore I consider them apart. The cock crowing was the signal our Lord had given to Peter, and therefore, when our Lord turned, it

was in some measure to call his attention to that signal. It was to Peter, a proof of the perfect knowledge our Lord possessed of the human heart, by the minuteness of the prediction respecting the signal, and the time, and the complete accomplishment. Little accidents may often produce great and powerful effects, may determine to much evil, or may be productive of much good. There was nothing in the voice that could create much alarm, further than that it was the voice of God. It was the signal of Providence : and when every thing exactly corresponds with the prediction, this is sufficient to rouse his attention. God sometimes employs other means, naturally much more alarming. Nebuchadnezzar was alarmed with the vision of the judgments of the Most High, coming upon himself ; the impious Belshazzar, by the hand writing. Saul was arrested in the progress of his persecution, by a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, and by an audible voice distinctly calling upon him,—*Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me ? I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.* Judas Iscariot was left to the workings of his own heart, which forced from him that confession,—*I have sinned, in that I have betrayed the innocent blood.* But Peter, only by the crowing of a cock. But it was foretold, and foretold by him who never erred—by him, who knew all things. But this is also miraculous ;

and every circumstance with it, was verified. A single word will produce great effect, if we be impressed with the belief, that it comes from God. The second circumstance is,—*Jesus turned, and looked upon Peter.* We read of no voice, no immediate address. Much might have been advanced, to aggravate the guilt of this disciple: he might have reproached him with his boasting, with his vain confidence, with his present cowardice. How! where is he now?—*Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee.* What ground for fear? It was only the challenge of a weak woman. His crime was also aggravated by cursing and swearing: *I know not the man.* How different is his behaviour, when contrasted with the mild treatment of Jesus Christ; he only *turned, and looked upon Peter.* This was enough. The human look and countenance, is often highly expressive, and may strike more terribly than the most powerful language. Looks can convey pleasure, approbation, joy, and confidence; and they can express displeasure, anger, pity, and contempt, and every various passion which actuates the human heart. And if man, with all his weakness and imperfection, can convey such language, how forcible must have been the looks of the ever-blessed Jesus. His words were powerful, in this his state of humiliation: disease fled at his rebuke; it cured the sick of the palsy, and

restored them to sound health ; it gave sight to the blind, strength to the lame, hearing to the deaf ; to the leper, it said,—*I will, be thou clean.* His word was powerful : the winds, the waves, heard and obeyed, and all nature submitted to his command. And equally commanding must be the majesty of his countenance and his all-penetrating eye. We see the effect of these in the case of Judas, when he and his associates came to apprehend Jesus Christ. When the question was put to them, as they drew nigh to our Lord,—*Whom seek ye ?* When they answered—*Jesus of Nazareth*—he readily answered them,—*I am he.* And with that tender attention to his disciples which he manifested on every occasion, said—*If ye seek me, let these go their way.* How gracious and kind ! We see the effect of that divine eloquence on other occasions. The apostle Paul, when reasoning before Felix, *on righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come*, caused him to tremble, and say,—*Go thy way for this time ; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.* But such was the powerful effect, that that season never came. A similar impression was produced on Agrippa, which moved him to say—*Almost thou persuadest me to be a christian.* Paul's answer is admirable :—*I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds.*

To return back to Peter. What contempt, upon recollection, must he feel for himself, and how much must he be stung with remorse and shame. The recollection of our faults, must always awaken, in virtuous minds, painful reflections: and when this is accompanied with the rebuke of a friend, whom we have greatly injured, it becomes insupportable, if we are not hardened in guilt. And what, then, must Peter have felt, from the look of a Master so great and so good, whom he had so deeply injured? It was a look also, that reminded Peter of the shameful falsehood he had been so daringly asserting,—*I know not the man*. It was challenging him now to acknowledge his Lord: it was bringing forcibly and immediately to his mind—his character, his greatness and goodness, his tenderness and his love to his disciples, and to the world. Look now, Peter, on that countenance, and confess him boldly before men. But the most distressing part is yet to come: it is telling him that he was well acquainted with his most horrid oaths and imprecations, and of that dreadful change which at this awful moment had taken place in his character. How can Peter sustain this? All his guilt must rush into his soul. If, then—when standing before the tribunal of men, in the lowest stage of his humiliation, at the very moment he was despised and rejected—his look could produce such powerful effects, how inex-

pressible must be his power, when seated on the throne of judgment, *in his glory, and all the holy angels with him!* Who, O God! can abide his coming? when with his piercing eye he looks on those sinners who have denied and blasphemed his name; and that have said—*Not this man, but Barabbas.* What words can express their shame, confusion, and terror? And then there will be no escaping; there will be no opportunity to go out and weep bitterly. Possessed with his power and knowledge, there will be no occasion for evidence, or for trial: their guilt will break forth on their countenances, and point them out to the world. If Peter, after only one offence, could not withstand his presence, when standing as a malefactor at the tribunal of men, how will sinners, loaded with guilt, abide his presence when he appears on the judgment seat of his Father? The same countenance which shakes the guilty with remorse and terror, will inspire the righteous with confidence and joy. A smile from him will remove every apprehension, and confirm their happiness for ever and ever.

The next stage of this history is, that *Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice.* We can scarcely suppose that Peter could have forgot what had so lately passed; rather must we infer, that it fixed his attention to those words, *before the cock crow, and*



brought him to a sense of their importance. Can we believe, after the warning given him by Christ, that Peter was determined to run all risks, till the crowing of the cock, as predicted, brought him to a sense of the consequence of denying Christ? The history of Judas, and the case of Peter, give to us a striking picture of human nature. Judas, at the last supper, was warned by Christ, that one of those who sat with him would betray him: besides this general notice, he had other intimations, calculated to make a deeper impression—it was one, who dipped his hand with him in the dish; and to add to the notice, it was one to whom, after having dipped a sop, he should give it: and Christ gave it to Judas. All these warnings were given, but they did not check the traitor in his design. Judas went to the chief priests and rulers with—*What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you?* He covenanted with them, and completed his guilt. And how then did all end? Did he enjoy any satisfaction in what he had done? He went and threw down the money—shame and remorse began:—*I have sinned, in that I have betrayed the innocent blood.* Peter's case was similar: he was warned—*That this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice.* Still he perseveres, till the third time was completed; and then *the Lord turned and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord,*

*how he had said unto him, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And Peter went out, and wept bitterly.* Judas, we find, recollected the warnings he had received, but the remembrance of his crime ended in despair. Peter was more favoured. We see in common life, how warnings generally terminate. Tell a man, that by pursuing such a course of life, he must ruin himself. Tell the drunkard, for instance : it is very obvious that such warnings will be verified. In spite of warnings and admonitions, he persists headlong ; he recollects not, or rather he attends not, till his guilt is complete. We may think the conduct of Judas and Peter, strange ; but we see it is exactly human nature—too positive, too untractable. After the last act of Peter's denial, *he went out, and wept bitterly.* Here all terminates well. These were tears of remorse, tears of repentance, tears of admiration, and tears of love. He could stand no longer in the presence of that Master, whom he had so much injured. But observe, he does not fly from him in resentment, in a fit of determined obstinacy. He retired to give vent to nature, that he might, after he had composed himself, return again with confidence and love. He did not desert the cause.

The next thing concerning Peter, of which we read, is, that on the morning of the resurrection, he was among the first at the sepulchre : then he knew and acknowledged *the Man.* And

his labours and sufferings, and faithful adherence to the cause of Christ, were undoubted evidences of his genuine repentance. Peter's character was such, that we cannot help esteeming him ; frank, open, and warm in his attachments ; and he also had the failings of that very character—rash, forward, and subject to alarms. To his fears alone we must ascribe his denying his Master : he ever loved him ; it was his love that brought him to that situation. It was no bad principle, no real change. Who can answer for their conduct in the day of trial. The crime of Judas arose from a bad heart—from his covetousness, a most detestable principle. His was the result of deep reflection—a cool and deliberate act. Peter's denial arose from fear ; he seems to have been so overpowered, that he knew not what he said. Our Lord, who knew well human nature, can make all gracious allowance for weak men.

Let none, from the example of Peter, sin, that they also, like him, may repent. . Remember the danger and difficulty in which a person places himself, by such an experiment. Peter's case arose from a sudden start of fear ; his transgression proceeded from no confirmed habit ; it was brought about from the weakness of nature, from no bad principle : he had formed no inclination to his vice ; he detested it. Men in general are governed by other principles ; they form an attachment to their vices, and are therefore not so

readily disposed to part with them. Peter rejoiced to be delivered. What impression must he have felt from that look of tenderness, expressive of the wish of his Lord to receive him again unto himself, and again to number him among his faithful friends and followers ! Peter had another advantage, which few of his friends can ever enjoy : he was in the immediate presence of Christ, and he handed forth his pity and compassion ; therefore his case can be no encouragement to others.

What an amiable view does our Lord and Master give of his kindness and condescension : how readily does he step forward, and seize upon the sinner in his sinking state, and rescue him from destruction. He might have employed other means to deliver him from his fall ; he could have made use of terrors, if necessary.—*By the terrors of the Lord he can persuade men.* He might threaten to withdraw his presence and love, and leave him to himself and to destruction ; but he puts forth his kindness : he turns and looks upon him with an eye of kindness and compassion, and what must be the power and influence of that benevolent wish, beaming with love ? this must have been felt in the most affecting manner. Could he ever wish to be separated from him ? This speaks the language in which his Heavenly Father spoke :—*This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased ; hear ye him.*

I have already observed, that the human face and look speak many different languages ; and in how many different languages must our adorable Redeemer speak to the world ? It is said of him by his enemies, who were sent to apprehend him, as an apology for not bringing him along with them,—*Never man spake like this man.* His speech, then, and manner, (unlike that of men,)—a powerful manner, prevented them from executing their commission. In another place, it is said,—*He did all things well.* In his prayers, there is something peculiar in the very manner. In the introduction to his prayer for his disciples, we find an excellence which must have had a powerful effect on all who heard. After his address to his disciples, it is said,—*These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come ; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee.* And in another part, where he says,—*O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me : nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.* We have a very interesting scene, when at the request of the sisters of Lazarus, Jesus came to impart to them consolation. He could have rebuked the disease of his friend at a distance, without coming to where he was : if the disease had not completed its work, he could have stopped its progress, and restored Lazarus to health and strength. But he had to glorify

God in this act, in the restoration of Lazarus ; this was one of his great works, and he embraced it as an opportunity to triumph over death and the grave, and to shew that he *was the resurrection and the life*. He was at a distance from the scene, when the case of Lazarus was made known to him. His sisters sent to him with this confident message,—*Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick. When Jesus heard that, he said, this sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby.* To make this work the more remarkable, after hearing of his sickness, *he abode two days still in the same place where he was.* Some conversation afterwards took place between our Lord and his disciples, relative to the case of Lazarus ; and then he said unto them,—*Our friend Lazarus sleepeth ; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep.* To this, the disciples said,—*Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well. Howbeit Jesus spake of his death : but they thought that he had spoken of taking of rest in sleep.* Then said Jesus unto them plainly, *Lazarus is dead. And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe ; nevertheless let us go unto him.* The interview between our Lord and the sisters of Lazarus, becomes now highly interesting. *Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met him ; but Mary sat still in the house.* This conduct

is characteristic. Martha's address to Jesus, is truly expressive of her affection for her brother, and confidence in our Lord.—*Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee.* Jesus speaks to her the powerful word of consolation;—*Thy brother shall rise again.* To this, Martha replies,—*I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day.* Jesus said unto her, *I am the resurrection and the life : he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.* His looks to Peter were powerful ; and here, his words to the sisters of Lazarus, must be of the greatest weight and authority.—*Never man spake like this man.* What feelings must they have excited in the hearts of those who heard them, and especially what powerful consolation must they have imparted to those to whom they were particularly addressed ; and how much more so, when they were confirmed by the prayer which preceded, and was followed by the loud voice of—*Lazarus, come forth.* Follow him in this affecting scene. Jesus accompanied the sisters to the grave of Lazarus. *When he saw Mary weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, he groaned in the spirit, and was troubled, and said, where have ye laid him ? They said unto him, Lord, come and see.* Jesus wept. This is all natural ; and this is the *High Priest* who is touched with

*the feeling of our infirmities ;* and though he was possessed of the power to grant effectual comfort and relief, yet he could not resist the feelings of nature. 'The remark which the Jews made on our Lord's conduct on this occasion, was,—*Behold how he loved him !* He approached to the grave, and ordered them to take away the stone ; and when they had done this, *Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I know that thou hearest me always.* And this prayer was followed by—he *cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth.* This is a most interesting collection of facts, not reasonings, and addressed to the understanding of the meanest. *He that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes : and his face was bound about with a napkin.* It is added, as a very natural consequence, that *many of the Jews which came to Mary, and had seen the things which Jesus did, believed on him.* If this was not evidence of divine power, what evidence could they have or desire ? Here was power, and power directed to the best of purposes ;—evidences of a future state and of the resurrection ;—evidences of divine goodness, and that God was the hearer of prayer ; and that Jesus was love, and that he manifested his love to the children of men. His looks, his words, his feelings, all bespeak his origin from heaven—that he *came from God, and was going to God again.*



Peter had received several advantages from his Lord. He was present when Jesus offered up the intercessory prayer for his disciples, in which we meet with many affecting expressions of tenderness and love to his friends. But we may begin with what passed when the multitude came to apprehend Jesus. When they approached, and when the question was put to them,—*Whom seek ye?* and they answered—*Jesus of Nazareth*; he readily replied,—*I am he: if therefore ye seek me, let these go their way.* Here he interposes, to take the whole upon himself: let these (pointing to his disciples) be set at liberty. Here is love! here is a striking character of the love peculiar to Jesus! Yet how soon is this character forgotten. Peter, to his great disgrace, says—*I know not the man*, and with cursing and swearing: with this accompaniment, it appears the more extraordinary. One may infer, that Peter must have been addicted to this shameful practice early in life; and bad practices of this kind are not easily relinquished. And this also furnishes us with a criterion of the morals of the Jewish people at that time; and it is the more extraordinary, when found amongst those who were brought up in the knowledge of the true God, and reverence to his holy name, and under a due sense of the commands of God,—*Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him*

*guiltless, that taketh his name in vain.* But this man had been long in the school of Christ, and taught by the most powerful teacher, that the Lord is not only great, but also good.

But to return to our Lord's intercessory prayer, his prayer for his disciples, and at which Peter was present. How earnestly and passionately does he plead in behalf of his chosen disciples. Amongst other things he prays—that where he was, there they might be also ; that they might be partakers of his glory ; that they might be one in him, as he was one with the Father ; that so long as they were in the world, they might be kept from the evil of the world. These, and similar tender expressions, could not fail to rise in the mind of Peter, on receiving the tender but reproving look of his exalted Lord. Peter also was generally, I perhaps may say always, one of those who were selected to be the witnesses both of the sorrows and joys of their Lord. He was one of the three, who were with him in the garden during his agony, when *his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground*, and when he prayed—*O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me : nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.* During this awful scene, the disciples fell asleep. Our Lord preferred this gentle rebuke—*What, could ye not watch with me one hour ?* but immediately, as if checking that rebuke, he brings forth an

apology,—*The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.* And is this *the Man* whom Peter knew not, after so many proofs of his goodness, his gentleness, and love? But he was present with him, and one of the three who saw his transcendent glory on the mount of transfiguration, when *his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light*; when, encompassed with a cloud, he talked with Moses and Elias; and when he heard *a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: hear ye him.* Peter had been an eyewitness of his majesty, when Christ received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, as already stated. And yet after all these proofs of his majesty and glory, and after being a chosen witness of his piety and fortitude in the garden; after all this to say, and in the hearing of Christ to declare with cursing and swearing,—*I know not the man!*—with the greatest propriety, therefore, may we call this look, a look of rebuke to Peter, for his shameful infidelity in denying that voice which came from heaven, in declaring that he knew not him who in so many instances had given to him and to the world, so many proofs of his power, wisdom, goodness, and love. But further, it was also to Peter a look of rebuke, for the violation of those protestations and vows of eternal fidelity to his

Lord, which, unasked and unsolicited, he had made : he pledged his life and faithful services amidst all dangers, and persisted in his protestations, notwithstanding the warnings and assurances given to him by Christ, of his weakness and of his fall. Soon were his Lord's warnings verified ; every circumstance literally fulfilled which Christ had foretold. How then must Peter have been filled with remorse, on Christ's looking upon him, when he recollected with what confidence and vehemence he had vowed, and how easily he had been led to desert and to deny Christ. A brave and generous mind could scarcely be detected in a more pitiable situation, than Peter was now in, covered undoubtedly with confusion for his rash vows, for his bold pretensions, but above all, for being guilty of such cowardice, and such a neglect of duty, as basely to join with the persecutors of his Master, to give them courage and confidence, by the denial of him with oaths and imprecations, and all in the hearing of his tender and greatly distressed Lord. All the persecutions of his enemies could not affect him so much, as the cruel usage of his avowed friend. 'The next step after this rebuke of our Lord, was Peter's remembrance of his words, how he had foretold of him,—*Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice.* 'The crowing of the cock seems to have made no impression on him, till the last time. Men in general pass

on through their sins, without attending to those striking circumstances which should alarm them, until such time as they are awakened by the rebukes of the Lord, and then all those circumstances, which passed before unheeded, become the subject of sad reflections and bitter lamentations. We see every day the terrible effects of sin, and we may also remember that the Lord has foretold them all. We see the wicked and disgraceful lives, and the miserable deaths of sinners, but they do not always produce their proper effects on mankind ; men persevere still, till conscience once be roused and awakened, and then the warnings we have had, become the causes of the most distressing and painful reflections. In this instance, Peter had a fresh proof of the power and greatness of his Lord, at the very time when he was despised and rejected of men, and in the deepest stage of his humiliation. At a time when Peter could not foresee his weakness, at a time when most probably he thought himself in the greatest security, he was warned, he was assured by his Lord, that he should fall, and fall so low, as to deny Christ. Now he saw all this faithfully accomplished, and with every circumstance with which it was foretold. Here then was fresh room for lamentation. He saw that Jesus, amidst all his apparent disgrace and weakness, was still the same. How painful to reflect that he had denied him. Had he found

him now in any respect changed, either in his character, or in his power ; had he been found deficient in his piety and virtue ; had his love to man been now changed to hatred, when put into the power of his enemies ; or had his power and wisdom been annihilated, now he had become a captive, Peter might have found some ground to justify himself in disowning him. But from all circumstances, seeing that Jesus was unchangeable in every respect, the same in his greatness and in his goodness ; that his sufferings were voluntary, and an additional proof of his love to the world ;—these were reflections that hastened forward Peter's sincere repentance, and brought him to a just sense of his offences and his guilt. After this, his repentance is expressed in this short account,—*He went out, and wept bitterly.* Godly sorrow is the first step in repentance. A man never will change that way of life, in which he finds no uneasiness or pain. This was to Peter the hour of deep darkness : a multitude of thoughts now crowded into his mind ; all his former tenderness and respect for his Saviour, return in their full force ; 'and at the same time, all the instances and proofs that he had received at different times, of his Saviour's love ; and that if he had been summoned to die by the side of his Lord, he could with pleasure have devoted his life to his service. Suppose his kind Master had not interposed with a gracious and

condescending look, but left him to himself, and to all the consequences of his guilt, what must have been his final portion ? Glorious was that testimony which he formerly gave ;—*Lord, to whom shall we go ? thou hast the words of eternal life.* Yet this very person was going upon the point of forsaking, and that for ever, Jesus Christ, and all that was great and good,

## SERMON XVI.

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ACTS xxiv. 14.

*But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets.*

OF the several charges produced against Paul, he only allows the truth of the heresy. He was charged with being a mover of sedition, of being a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes, and also of profaning the temple. The first and last he denies positively in the 12th and 13th verses, and calls upon his accusers to produce their proof. But in the text, he confesses what they call *heresy*, and explains his meaning,—*So worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets: and have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.* In this explanation of his faith, he takes no particular notice of his being a ringleader. He does not particularly mention his faith in Christ: but still we are not to suppose that he omits this part of his confession either from fear or shame. He was much superior to these



weak passions. He was never on any occasion, ashamed of the gospel or cross of Christ, but on the contrary, gloried in them. Nor was he afraid ; *for he counted, he says, his life not dear unto him, so that he might finish his course with joy, and the ministry, which he had received of the Lord Jesus Christ.* And that he was not particularly intimidated on the present occasion, we may collect from what follows, v. 24. They heard him there, this very assembly, concerning the faith in Christ. But the design is evident. He did not want to offend his hearers by an abrupt introduction of the christian religion, which was the very thing in dispute. Their minds were to be prepared beforehand for its reception. The first thing, and the most proper for this purpose, was to prove to them, that they were not called upon to embrace any new system by obeying the gospel ; they were not to depart from the religion of their ancestors, but to follow entirely its directions. The Jewish scriptures pointed out Christ as to come, and taught them to acknowledge and obey him when he did come. Christ was the great end of the law and the prophets. To him alone all their predictions tended. When he says, therefore, that he *believed all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets*, it was founding his faith upon these declarations. The question, then, is reduced to this,—*Did they believe the Law and the Pro-*

*phets?* This they would not deny. Then do the law and the prophets teach us to expect Christ the Messiah? All the Jews owned this. Here too they were agreed. It remains then, only to prove to them that Jesus of Nazareth was the very Christ. There is no impropriety, therefore, no evasion intended, in not taking notice immediately of his faith in Christ. This would have alarmed them. This would have prevented a patient hearing. He begins properly with an article on which both parties were agreed, that is, in their belief of the law and the prophets: and from this, as a principle, he means to establish the grand conclusion, that Christ was the Messiah, and that, therefore, so far from being guilty of heresy, he was maintaining the true faith, he was firmly adhering to the scriptures. They only were guilty of heresy, who denied Christ, as, I make no doubt, he would at that very time, prove. He makes use of the very same reasoning in chap. xxvi. 22. *Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come: that Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead.* And in that striking and sudden address to Agrippa afterwards,—*King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets?* Our Saviour himself, in Luke xxiv. 25.

says to his disciples,—*O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the Prophets have spoken : ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.* And the disciples, afterwards, when talking of what passed, say,—*Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?*

It appears, then, that the best foundation for our faith and hope, is the word of the living God. This is an opinion which Paul delivers at other opportunities, besides the present. Speaking to the Ephesians, he says,—*And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone.* The only rule of faith, worship, and manners, is the holy scriptures, because they contain a collection of all useful and practical truths, the most perfect system of morals, and are also the best foundation of our hopes. The scriptures, as I have often had occasion to observe, deliver nothing for the gratifying of a vain curiosity. They say nothing about the secrets of nature, and they unfold none of the abstruse decrees of God ; and the reason is, that none of these things are necessary for our happiness. But they tell us that there is a Supreme Being, that we are under the care of his providence,

and that there is another world beyond the grave. They teach us the necessity of holiness to happiness, and every thing necessary for the regulation of our conduct. Then, with regard to morals, no system was ever to be compared with them. The scripture morals are excellent, not only in what they enjoin, but likewise in what they omit. The precepts, in the New Testament, never descend to minute particulars, but are general and comprehensive, from which flow all the minute branches of duty. The general principles are to love the Lord,—this comprises every duty respecting God: to love man,—this includes not only what we are to do to man, but what we are to forbear. With respect to dealings, nothing could be desired so equitable and full, as,—*Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them.* The other duties are expressed equally full,—forgiveness of injuries, pardon of offences, and love to enemies. In all there is observed the utmost regard to wisdom and also to dignity. Then with respect to things omitted, we see here the excellence of the scripture morals. We have no precepts with regard to forms of government. This is not the business of religion. It leaves these things in the very state in which it found them. Such things are to be regulated by a regard to the tempers, situations, &c. of the people to be governed. We have no particular precepts

with respect to meat or drink, or such things, where religion is no ways concerned. *Let all things be done decently and in order*, and all for edification: never lose sight of them. We might next notice the powerful motives which the scriptures constantly propose. God is our witness and our judge. We are immortal creatures, and our eternal state will be determined by our behaviour whilst here. *The world will be judged in righteousness*. What arguments can be more persuasive? The scriptures contain also the best foundation of all our happiness. Every other system is fluctuating, depending upon the opinion of men, and those men that formed them, can give no security for their accomplishment. But the scriptures are the word of the living God, delivered by proper authority, and fitted to make a deep and lasting impression on all.

But Paul's situation here, shews us how apt men are to give bad and unpopular names to good things. They call him a *babbler*. He was branded as an *heretic*, because he preached *Christ Jesus and the Resurrection*. This is a word that often serves party and factious purposes; it is calculated to catch the ear of the unthinking, who are led oftener by the sound than the sense. He differed from the multitude in his opinions, but we see this was no proof of his being in an error: this is sometimes the fate of the most

upright of men. The worst kind of heresy is when men set up opinions merely to be the leaders of a party, and when these opinions are supported with great heat and animosity, especially if such things be in themselves frivolous, and have no tendency to edification.—This is a vile heresy. But to seek after interesting truths, where the cause of godliness is concerned, and to support these with a manly firmness, and proper christian charity and candour, is the duty of all men. In all researches, however, of this kind, and all controversies raised about them, we should remember the following cautions :—1st, 'That all men are weak, and that we ourselves are liable to errors ; hence, positiveness, particularly ill nature and rudeness, in the support of such things, are highly unbecoming. 2d, 'That errors are not to be sanctified by time alone, and therefore, if we find any thing in our principles contrary to the scriptures, or *the form of sound words*, we ought to part with it, however old the opinion may be, or however much sanctified by time or great names. These circumstances can never change the nature of things. 3d, In all controversies and enquiries of this nature, let us never forget charity ; otherwise, in contending for what we take to be the truth, we are breaking through some of the plainest commands. Beware therefore, of being swayed by rancour or party spirit. Let the discovery and support of truth, be your

sole motive, and not a desire of victory. But another lesson we should learn, is, that the scriptures, and them only, are to be the standards of our faith. Paul appeals to them. Our Saviour also appeals to them, and exhorts us to search the scriptures; and at the same time he reprobates all the traditions of the elders, and every thing contrary to the plain letter of the word of God. The Jews maintained two kinds of laws; the first, the written law, or the scriptures; and the second, the oral law, handed down from one generation to another. Some of the churches that call themselves orthodox, hold similar principles—the scriptures, and then the decisions of the church. But it is easy to see into what a labyrinth of errors men must be led, who adopt such opinions. There can be no bounds set to such principles: they are constantly piling error upon error, till the word of God becomes entirely lost. The arguments for adhering to the scriptures alone, are the most decisive possible. First, God has left to us the scriptures in the very form which he, in his infinite wisdom, knew would be the best adapted to the exigences of mankind. The order the most proper: no studied arrangement. Like the works of nature, a beautiful mixture. Every where we meet with a doctrine, a precept, an example, or a comfort. Is it proper, then, for men to alter or new model this form? But to whom does this power belong?

The sentiments of men on this head are so various, that they never could all agree upon any one certain arrangement or order. Again: Are there in scripture many things left vague and undetermined? And does it belong, then, to men, to reduce to a determinate meaning, those things which the Spirit of God has left open? Certainly no good reason can be shewn for this. Things that are left undetermined in scripture, ought not certainly to be reduced to a precise and determined sense by men. Lastly, we may see that it is the duty of a christian to labour to obtain a firm belief in the scriptures. The advantages of this are manifest: 1st, Without this belief, all our services are nothing but formal, lifeless, and unprofitable. We worship God only because it is customary, but we can feel no pleasure and relish in his service, unless we have a firm belief of the scriptures. 2d, This belief lays a foundation for duty. How differently shall we serve God, if we believe that the scriptures are his word, from what we should do, if we had no such persuasion? How feelingly shall we join in his praises, when we believe in the scriptures. 3d, The scriptures are a foundation on which a man can rest. If all goes well with him, it is pleasant to have at the same time the additional consolation and enjoyment that the scriptures yield: if, on the contrary, his affairs in this life are not so successful as he



wishes, still a man in this distress has a great resource in the word of God. He leans upon it, and it helps to bear him up : he clings to the thousand promises that are every where scattered there. Man may rob him of every other thing, but of this comfort he cannot deprive him : whereas a man, miserable in a worldly sense, and that has not this resource to flee to, is poor and miserable indeed. He possesses also another advantage ; he has the scriptures for his guide and director : these have been a source of comfort to good men in all ages. This world is a dark and intricate state ; we stand in need of some friend to stand by us, and some guide to point out to us the way. To take away the scriptures out of the world, would be like pulling the sun from the heavens. What a dark and bewildered world was this, before the day-spring from on high, the light of the blessed gospel, shone upon it ! Judge then what we should be at present, if we were again to be deprived of this inestimable treasure. We set little value upon this treasure, because we know not its real worth. But how much does it exalt man ! It is the scriptures that make him known as a spiritual and immortal being. They give him a just notion of himself, and of his most valuable rights. Search the scriptures ; acquaint yourselves with their evidences ; follow their directions ; and bless God for sending us the gospel.

## SERMON XVII.

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1 PETER, ii. 21.

*For even hereunto were ye called : because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps.*

THE station in which our Saviour appeared, was the best suited for a public example, as he had an opportunity of practising all those virtues that men are principally called upon to observe, and especially those that are of the most trying and difficult nature ; and though he had not an opportunity of shewing, in his station, the particular duties of a prince, or a magistrate, or such as are particularly required from the great and the wealthy, yet the duties that he practised were of that extensive and powerful nature, that they belonged to every character, and no one could follow them, without being every way qualified for the highest stations of life. The prince, under the influence of them, must be amiable ; they would prove the best ornament and security of his government : and the magistrate, possessed of the christian virtues, will be humane, upright, and just. Let us then examine the example of Christ, under two general heads

of duty. First: in our duty to God. And secondly: in the duties that we owe to men.

1st, In those duties that we owe to God, Christ has left us a pattern of the most exalted piety, the most perfect obedience, and the most complete resignation and submission to the Divine will. On every occasion, we see the honour of his Heavenly Father the uppermost in his heart. Every offence against himself he either entirely overlooks, or most graciously forgives. They may call him a blasphemer, a raiser of sedition, in league with the prince of devils, a friend of publicans and sinners; but he shews no emotion, he seeks no revenge; with the utmost calmness he only makes such observations as shewed the composure and tranquillity of his mind: *If Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand? And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out? therefore they shall be your judges.—But wisdom is justified of her children.* They vilified his great works, they took every opportunity of exciting the multitude against him, they spat upon him; but still, he reviled not again, but returned blessing for cursing. But when any thing was offered against the honour of God, no place nor presence could prevent him from testifying his indignation: we have several instances of this. When he went into the temple, and saw the profane traffic that was carried on in that

house which was peculiarly blessed with the presence of the Deity, *he made a scourge of small cords, he drove out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves.* It is remarkable that he exerts no divine power, and yet his presence and his rebuke was sufficient to chastise the impiety and profanity of those who polluted the temple. It remains a proof, that in wickedness there is always something of such cowardice and meanness, that it must ever shrink before innocence and purity. We have another instance of the great jealousy that he entertained for the Divine honour. When one came and asked him,—*Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?* seeing, perhaps, that it was spoken in an unmeaning manner, or from mere curiosity, he sharply rebuked him,—*Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God.* We find him also carefully promoting God's honour by ascribing his great works, and also his doctrines, to his Heavenly Father. *I came not, he says, to do my own will, but the will of him that sent me.* And again,—*If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God.—I must work the works of him that sent me.—And,—My Father is greater than I.* Such, then, is the example that our Divine Instructor and Pattern has set us, of the honour

that we should pay at all times to our Father in heaven. It becomes us not, then, to sit patiently and hear his holy name blasphemed, his religion abused, and things most sacred, trampled under the feet of the impious and profane : we ought to testify a proper and prudent resentment at such insults, after the example of our Lord. And at the same time also, let us carefully support the honour of Christ himself ; for whoso *honoureth him, honoureth also the Father that sent him*. But our Lord was also exemplary in his piety and devotion : we find him often in the temple and in the synagogue, joining in the public worship of God, and taking such opportunities also to instruct the people. He went up to Jerusalem at the different feasts, which were prescribed by the Law of Moses : for all was not finished in that imperfect dispensation, until he bowed his head and gave up the ghost. It is not to be doubted but that he was punctual and exemplary in the daily services of God : we have reason to conclude this, from the marks of piety and fervent devotion that on all occasions appear in his behaviour. Sometimes, when employed in working great miracles, we find him praying to God, as when Lazarus was raised from the dead.—*He lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always.* This is a lesson to us, that in all undertakings, especially those of import-

ance, we should turn to God, for in vain are all our efforts without his assistance and blessing. On occasions of great joy, we find him rising in the most exalted strains of piety, and sublime devotion. When the Seventy whom he sent forth to preach, reported to him the success of their mission, it is said,—*In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes : even so, Father ; for so it seemed good in thy sight.* This is to teach us, that in every success, we are to give the glory and thanks to God. A life spent in this manner, is to proceed upon the scripture maxim, to set God always before us, to acknowledge him in all our ways. And this maxim was never so well taught and recommended, as in the practice of our Divine Lord : he never loses sight of his Heavenly Father. We have also an example of piety from our Lord in another affair ; that it is our duty to pray for others as well as ourselves. This is taught us by our blessed Master, in his beautiful intercessory prayer : at that time, *Jesus lifted up his eyes to heaven.* We have the very posture, as indicating the most fervent devotion. Never was piety to God so well expressed, as in this prayer ; and with what ardent language does he pray for his disciples :—*Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast*

*given me, that they may be one as we are.* And at that time, he prayed also for all his other disciples, who ever should be in this world :—*Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word,* In such language and prayers, the providence of God is taught us in the most powerful manner. He is represented as the common Father of all mankind, but particularly the Father and preserver of all his people. But that his example might be as complete as possible, in his great agonies and distress, he flies to God. In the garden, and on the cross :—*O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me : nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.—My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me ?* He felt during these periods of suffering, the most acute pains, pains in the mind much greater than all the agonies of the body, and he addressed himself to God as his only comforter. Such an example was much wanted in the world, to comfort and instruct men. He points out to us by this, that in all distresses we are to call upon God ; and he teaches us the sentiments that should at that time prevail in our minds, yea the very language that we should hold. We may lawfully, we find, pray for ease in distress, or even for a removal of our pain, but not to insist upon such removal, but rather resign ourselves to God's disposal, as being the best able to judge what is

fit for us. But Christ's piety is instructive in another manner. He teaches us by his example, that it is not enough to join in public worship, and to pray with our family and friends, but that it is often necessary to retire from the world, and to pray in private to God. For us, particularly, such retirement is absolutely necessary; and we may indeed infer, that it was not so much on his account, as to be a proper example, that we meet with such instances of the retirements of our blessed Saviour. We stand in need of retirement for more than one reason; that by meditation and recollection, we may remove some of those stains that we are apt to contract in our intercourse with the world; that we may then more freely, and with more recollection, address ourselves to our God. And prayer in retirement is also proper for another reason, because then we may lay open our peculiar cases unto God. In public prayer, or even in family prayer, we can only with propriety suit our prayers to the common cases and wants of the whole; but in private prayer, we are to suit our own particular case: this is its peculiar advantage. Our Saviour, we find, often retired from the multitude, to a desert place, or to a mountain, and continued sometimes all the day, and at other times all the night, in prayer to God. If we, therefore, wish to maintain our piety, and intercourse with the Supreme Being, it will be often necessary for



us, after Christ's example, to retire from the tumult and bustle of the world, to converse with Him who made us, and on whom we constantly depend. To encourage this duty of prayer, he taught his disciples how to pray. But in Christ we have an example of another duty towards God, which was, a filial obedience. He came, he says, into this world, to do the will of his Father; and that he accounted it as his meat and his drink to do the will of God. His whole life was a constant course of the most active obedience. Christ's obedience was not confined to that which keeps only from doing evil, and offending against God: this is of the very lowest kind. It is but a mean character to say of one, that he is harmless and inoffensive. But our Lord's obedience consisted in a continued course of the most exalted goodness, so that we have no reason to doubt but that every part of his life was completely filled up, either in his duties to God, or in acts of goodness to man. We find him travelling constantly throughout the whole land of Judea and of Galilee, occupied in instructing the ignorant, in curing the prejudiced, in relieving those that laboured under grievous diseases, and in doing good to all. Obeying the will of God is not to be limited to those services that have God only for their object; such as prayer, praise, thanksgiving, and trust. God is best served in promoting universal righteousness,

in advancing the ends of pure and rational virtue, and in doing good to the bodies and souls of men. We cannot profit God, but we may do good to our fellow-creatures : we often have such offices in our power, and therefore we cannot better serve God, than by advancing the happiness of his creatures. Men often fall into narrow notions of God's service, by confining religion solely to meditations on the Supreme Being, and praying to and praising him ; but this was not the service that our Saviour has given us an example of. In his life, the service of God was happily reconciled with his goodness to man. He lived a common life, he lived among men, in order to teach us how we should live and behave towards one another. His doctrines and precepts extend to both duties ; he calls upon us to worship God, who is a spirit, and to serve him with all our heart ; and then to love our neighbour as ourselves. He who taught us to pray to God, and also in what manner to pray, hath said, that blessed are the merciful, the meek, and the peace makers ; he hath enjoined us to pardon our enemies, to forgive offences, and to do unto all men as we would wish that they should do unto us : and all these examples of obedience Christ himself hath set us. Such, then, is the obedience that God requires of all the followers of his Son. But he gave us not only an example of obedience, but of the most cheerful kind. There is a cer-

tain disposition necessary, to render our religious services acceptable, and without that disposition, they will never be accepted by God, and that disposition is cheerfulness. The service of God without this, without cheerfulness, can never be pleasing to him. How much does this disposition shew itself in the life of our Lord. The fervency of his devotion is a proof that it was accompanied by the heart; the zeal also which he every where discovers for the honour and service of God, is another proof how far his obedience came from his heart. Zeal is a necessary part in all our religious services. This zeal manifests itself in a variety of ways; in being earnest about our principles, in being hurt whenever religion is wounded, in not only being desirous to serve God, but also to serve him aright. Languor and indifference in any of these things, is a sign that religion has no hold of the heart, and then we may be very certain, that it will never in that case have much influence upon the life. But in our Saviour, we see all carried forward with spirit and zeal; he even *stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem* to suffer, notwithstanding he had a perfect knowledge of every thing that must there befall him. But it was his Father's will, and he cheerfully obeyed;—*Not my will, he says, but thine be done.* Another character of our Saviour's obedience was, that it was perfect. We cannot pretend to come up

to this, yet still we should strive to follow and to come as near to him in all things as possible. This is the only way to keep in an improving state. This was the very idea the apostle had in view : he was not satisfied with any attainment that he had made, but was pressing constantly *towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.*

2dly, I have already gone through those duties that Christ paid to God. I come now to consider those duties of which he has left us an example, towards men. The first thing that strikes us in this part of his character, is, that he was totally devoid of all selfishness. In the very best of men, we find too often a mixture of this selfishness, which appears in different ways : sometimes it discovers itself in grasping at every thing that may promote immediately their own interests, seizing every opportunity of making gain. At other times, it makes its appearance in withholding from others what is their just due, and also in shutting the bowels of mercy against all the cries of indigence and misery. There is, besides these, another kind of selfishness, which breaks out in the desire of praise, and in seeking after fame. These kinds of selfishness appear less or more, in every character, even in the most perfect and upright of men. We cannot totally divest ourselves of such criminal weaknesses ; but certainly the more we have of this selfish

passion, the more odious do we appear in the eyes of men, the less fit for society, the less amiable, and the less useful. Now in the history of our Lord, it is impossible to find the least marks of this character : he never sought his own interest, but the interest only of men. It is impossible to discover that he ever aims in any one thing at his own interest : if he had ever had the smallest views of that kind, he seems to have had both powers and opportunities also sufficient to gratify it. His powers, if he had chosen to exert them for such purposes, were certainly sufficient to have commanded the attention and obedience of the whole world ; and if he had been disposed to have raised himself to earthly power and dominion, we find that the multitude were really inclined to make him a king. Judea was in such a humour at that time, that they wanted only a leader, to attempt to throw off the Roman yoke ; but our Saviour ever discouraged all such favours : he intermeddled in no respect with the powers of this world. He exhorted to give tribute to Cæsar, and he himself set the example. He made disciples, not by the offers or promises of earthly rewards, for he fairly warned them of the sufferings they must expect. He never courted the favour of the great, but freely rebuked their vices. His doctrines were not popular, but on the contrary were opposite to the sinful desires of men. He

was so disinterested in all things, that he was willing to suffer all himself, if his disciples only could but be exempted. It is plain, then, that worldly interest was not his motive ; and upon examination, we shall also find that he was equally averse to all foolish and vain applause. It was necessary for one reason, that his great works should be public, because they were to be the evidences of his religion ; but they were not done in public, that they might captivate the good opinion of the people : this was always carefully avoided. There was no parade in the performance ; they were performed as it were in secret and by stealth ; you could only know them by their effects. He spake the word, and his patients were instantly relieved. Some of his works were done whilst he himself was at a great distance from the person restored : such as when he cured the centurion's servant. Sometimes the patient was dismissed with—*See thou tell no man.* His greatest works were effected as it were by accident, as when he raised the widow's son of Nain. When he raised Lazarus, he only *cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth.* And it is remarkable, that after he had performed a multitude of miraculous cures, he commonly retired from the multitude to a desert place, to a mountain, or to the sea, to avoid their acclamations and blessings, and to give his enemies an opportunity of suppressing his growing fame.

We have an instance of his directing the torrent of popular applause from himself to the improvement of the people. A certain woman raised to ecstasy by his great works and his divine discourses, calls out,—*Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked. But he said, yea rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it.* We indeed meet with one instance, where there appears something like a desire of popular applause, as when he rode in triumph to Jerusalem. But from the general tenor of his conduct, we are not allowed to put such an interpretation upon it, and particularly from attending to the action itself, that he made no kind of use of it to advance his own fame or interest. The design of his compliance with this, seems,—1st, to have been, that the scriptures might be fulfilled. This the evangelist takes notice of in Matthew xxi. 4. 2d, The great design also might have been to testify to the world by this action, that he was not actuated by worldly power or fame. For the same power that commanded the people, and engaged their affections so violently on the present occasion, could have gained and secured to him any design that he might choose to have formed. And lastly, it might be to secure the world more immediately to attend to him, and particularly to attend to his death and sufferings, which he was soon to accomplish at Jerusalem.

Upon the whole, our Lord was the most perfect pattern of disinterestedness; and his example is the severest reproof of all unreasonable selfishness, whether it appears in keeping up, or holding together wealth, or in an eagerness and thirst of popular fame. All, particularly the former, are unconnected with social duties, and contrary to that love and goodness which we owe to man. I have therefore begun with this part in the example of our Lord's social duties, as it is the foundation of all the rest. Those that love themselves too well, and do every thing for their own gratification, can never love mankind as God requires, and as Jesus taught and practised. Nothing so unlike the character of Christ, as selfishness. But secondly : he has given us an example of the most enlarged and active goodness, exercised both to the bodies and souls of men ; to friends, to enemies, to good men, and even to sinners. The character given him was, that *he went about, doing good*. He waited not for the applications of the distressed, but was continually travelling throughout all the land of Judea and Galilee, that the lame and the infirm, and the comfortless, might have an opportunity of experiencing his most enlarged benevolence. The first thing in this part of his character, was his doing good to the bodies of men. This is a very necessary part of benevolence and charity : it is also one of the best evidences that



we wish well to their souls. That charity which is confined wholly to the soul, is often to be suspected. Men well know, and will not scruple to say, that instructions and prayers cost but little, and that even the most covetous and niggardly, may be profuse in these. It may be, therefore, a recommendation of prayers and good instructions, to administer according to our ability, to the wants of the necessitous and indigent, and to do for their bodies also what services we have in our power. Our blessed Lord has given to us the most extensive example of this duty. We have not an instance of his ever refusing the request of any petitioner; all that applied to him, were sure to meet with relief. When the Syrophenician woman applied to him, it is true, that at first he seemed to discourage her: *I am not sent (said he) but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.* But the design of this seeming refusal, was only to call forth her faith and worth in a more illustrious manner, and thus gradually to cure the prejudices of the Jews. It is impossible to enumerate all the benevolent actions of our Lord: the Evangelists relate a considerable number; but *there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one,* (says the evangelist John, by a bold figure of speech,) *I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written.* But besides the good actions

of our Lord, considered simply in themselves, there are also several circumstances accompanying them, which are essential to such actions, and which help to constitute their great excellence and worth: they were without all ostentation; this I have had occasion already to notice. The parade and ostentation which too often accompany the good actions of men, render them disgusting, and also to them unprofitable. We ought not to sound a trumpet before us; we should not *let our left hand know what our right hand doeth*. As a second character, they should be accompanied with gentleness and with love. We never see the smallest traces of severity in any part of our Lord's good actions; he is often so kind as to take offenders under his special care and protection. Amongst the number of those who applied to our Lord for bodily relief, we need not doubt but that a great number had been instrumental in bringing upon themselves their disorders. Intemperance spreads plague, and innumerable diseases among men; but our blessed Saviour never mingles his benevolent cures with any harsh reproofs: all was done in kindness. I do not notice this, as if I meant to say, that such offenders should not be reproved; they well deserve it, and it is proper that they should be reproved. But I mention it as a proof of our Lord's exalted and perfect goodness: he did every thing complete. The great physician

both of body and of soul, comforted his distressed patients by his acts of gentleness and kindness : when his hand relieved, his heart also pitied and melted for his patients. Nothing can be a greater blemish in any good act, than to see it done with a bad and a hard heart. There is a certain degree of kindness and of feeling that should accompany us in all cases of relief ; that constitutes a perfect conformity : when you feed, cherish also and cheer. Good actions are sometimes done with such a bad grace, that when the hand receives, the heart cannot bless. Our Lord does not perform his great cures with the cold indifference of one that is concerned only for his own interest or fame : he enters with the most tender concern into every case that comes before him : his common language is,—*Son, daughter, be of good cheer* ; and he adds, as the greatest of all comforts, *thy sins are forgiven thee*. There is the most amazing condescension in his manner and language. Those who, on account of their loathsome disease, had been for a long time the outcasts of society, and disowned by all men, are called the *sons* and *daughters* of our blessed Lord. It is remarkable also, that he almost always confers more than his petitioner durst ask. They applied only for the cure of their bodily infirmities ; but our Saviour not only grants the request in its fullest sense, but also after adds,—*Thy sins are forgiven thee*.

This is a part of our Lord's character, which it is our great duty to imitate ; to copy after him in doing good, and to endeavour to do it also, not only without a grudging heart, but with cheerfulness : and besides his blessed example, he has promised the greatest of all rewards ; for notwithstanding, says he, speaking on this subject, they may not be able to recompense thee, yet *thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just.* There is, indeed, no pleasure in life equal to this, to rejoice the heart of the distressed. Our Lord had often opportunities of seeing the blessed effects of his goodness, which was the only pleasure that he enjoyed on this earth. Those that had experienced his miraculous goodness, often could not contain themselves ; finding their limbs restored, it is said, that they sometimes walked and leaped, and praised God. And to help in some measure to correct and regulate our feelings for the miserable, let us take notice of the regard our Saviour pays them. As I have already mentioned, he never paid any kind of undue homage to the great men of this world, nor united with the joyous and merry hearted ; but the sons and daughters of affliction he addressed with every tender name—son and daughter, to teach his followers what regard is due to them and their miseries ; and that when many of those, to whom the meanness and flattery of men are now paying every homage, shall be

condemned to dwell for ever with devouring fire, many of the lame, the hungry, and the naked, shall be advanced to the side of their enthroned Redeemer, and shine as the stars of the firmament for ever and ever. But another part of our Saviour's social character that we are called upon to imitate, is, his charity and benevolence to the poor. His situation in life was such, that he had none of the affluence and riches of this world, to distribute to the necessitous. He had no home nor dwelling-place ; no, nor yet a hole in which to recline his blessed head. Yet it appears from some part of the gospel history, that from some common fund, arising perhaps from the joint labour of our Lord and his disciples, they were wont to distribute something to the relief of the needy. For when our Lord intimated to Judas, when he had formed the design of betraying him, that what he did, he should do quickly, the disciples mistook his meaning, and thought that as Judas carried the bag, and what was contained in it, he was desiring him to give something to the poor ; which is a proof that this was with him a common practice. We see, indeed, his charitable heart on other occasions. Whenever the multitude had been with him any considerable time, he felt for them, he knew that they would be hungry. He was well acquainted with every part of our nature, and he was not one of those austere and morose

teachers, that loved to mortify his disciples ; on the contrary, he wished to prevent their wants. Hence we find him ordering his disciples to provide for them, and supplying their deficiency by his own miraculous power. It was his maxim, *that it was more blessed to give than to receive ;* a maxim which has, alas ! been reversed by most of his disciples. Our Saviour has laid particular stress upon this duty, and has given us some particular precepts for its regulation. Our alms are to be done in secret : and the left hand is not to know what the right hand doeth. The character of men will be determined at the last day, by this principle—the feeding the hungry, the clothing the naked, the visiting the sick and those who are in prison ; and even a cup of cold water given, in the name of a disciple, shall not want its reward. A number of other arguments might be insisted on for enforcing this duty, but these fall not at present in the way. What I wish now chiefly to recommend, is the example of Christ. Besides what I have already said upon this subject, a great number of things offer themselves still, for consideration : as, his care for the souls of men, which was his supreme care ; for it is this part that makes man truly valuable ; his example in his filial relations, or his duties towards his mother ; and his example in the private duties. But from what has now been said,

We may observe, in the first place, that one general principle runs through all Christ's life, and that is, the most perfect goodness; this is the main spring of all his actions, and every thing that he did may be accounted for by this. We then may see, from his example, how amiable a truly good man must be. View him in comparison with the wicked and the selfish, doing every thing for their own gratification; whether they eat or drink, or whatsoever they do, all to please, all to pamper themselves. Narrow and contracted minds!

Secondly: We may learn from what has been said, a just idea of the christian character; it is, to imitate Christ. This was one end of Christ's coming into this world, to give us an example. And in all things imitable, we are to copy after him; and to imitate Christ, is to imitate God. We have never seen God at any time, nor can see him; and yet we are exhorted to be holy as God is holy. But we have both the mind and the example of Christ; and he was the brightness of the Father's glory. Till such time as we make this our plan, we may bear the name of Christ, but we cannot be his disciples indeed.

Thirdly: Let us often seriously examine ourselves upon this head—how far do I conform to the character of my Lord? do I imitate him in the fervency of my devotions, and in my obedi-

ence? or am I negligent? Examination means nothing, unless it excite to amendment. It signifies nothing to say, I am a sinner; and, God help me; and such like, when you take no one step to get out of those sins. Rise then, look to Christ, and follow him.



## SERMON XVIII.

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JOB v. 6.

*Although affliction cometh not forth of the dust,  
neither doth trouble spring out of the ground.*

REFLECTIONS of this kind arise from different causes; from public calamities, or from private troubles; from afflictions as they affect ourselves, or as they affect our families or friends. They proceed sometimes from bodily sufferings, and sometimes from mental distresses. An occasion of this nature has called my mind to the present subject. A disease, far from being ranked either among the painful or among the very alarming diseases which afflict our nature, yet of that degree as to put a stop to my usefulness, to prevent me from supporting my part in the solemn services of religion; and a disease also of that nature, that it might soon have risen to a degree sufficiently alarming, calls upon me to embrace this first public opportunity of expressing my gratitude to my merciful and powerful deliverer; and in the second place, to suggest from the subject of afflictions in general, such improvement, as may tend to our general edification.

The first thing, then, which claims our attention, is the cause and origin of afflictions. This is given to us in the words of the text, in language the most elegant and affecting: *cometh not forth of the dust*. The very silence in these words, speak: *come not from the dust*, conveys a great deal. It is saying, that they are not accidents. Accidents may be said to spring from the dust, if we acknowledge no Supreme and Superintending Cause. If they proceed not from the Supreme Governor and Director of all things, if they are under the influence and management of no wisdom, then they may be said, to spring from the dust; and doctrines of this kind, we can direct to no kind of improvement. A bullet, shot at random, may, in its range, take away the life of some important man. Different reflections would arise from this, called accident: one would say, it sprung from chance, for there was no view and no design in him that drew the trigger. This may be granted, so far, on both sides. But another, and upon the principle of the text, would infer that some invisible director conducted and managed the whole: that man was the instrument, the blind, and we must say, the guiltless instrument; but some wise agent, which we cannot discern, managed and influenced the whole. Chance has no power; and those things which we call accidents or chance, are under the perfect guidance and direction of infinite wisdom.

Hence diseases spring not from the dust, but are under the same wise direction. We account for them from infection in many cases ; but who placed the object in this line of danger ? who gave the direction to this infection, and its power ? Even this cause, which proves satisfactory to some, yet is in general so circumstanced, as to be attended with insuperable difficulties. In the same family, where to our eyes all are equally exposed, yet individuals are selected ; the infection seizes upon one, and passes by another equally within its range, and equally exposed. This brings us back to the doctrine of the text, the most satisfactory, and perhaps the most philosophical, *that afflictions come not forth of the dust*. From whence then ? For the expression implies not, that there is no source, but that there must be some cause ; and no cause so rational, and so perfectly satisfactory, as assigning the whole to God. Now, this very sacred writer, applies these directly to God, in other passages. When he was deprived of all his family ; *when his sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house, there came a great wind from the wilderness, and smote the four corners of the house*, which crushed in its fall, all his family. And this was the sequel of previous calamities, which had robbed him of all his earthly substance, and reduced him from being the richest man in all the east, to a state

of the most abject poverty. He ascribes these calamities, not to his enemies, not to the violence of the elements, but to the appointment of the Supreme Governor.—*Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither : the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away ; blessed be the name of the Lord.* Here Job speaks plainly, not resting satisfied with saying *affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground.* It is from the Lord. 'This is the only satisfactory account that man can give for the origin of evil, a subject that has puzzled philosophers in all ages. We see striking instances of the overruling hand of Providence, in these things we may call accidents, recorded in holy writ, for our edification and comfort. The history of Joseph is a remarkable illustration of this. Some of his troubles, at first sight, seem to come from the dust, and yet these terminate finally in his happiness. The coat of many colours in which his father dressed him, only creates the envy and jealousy of his brethren. And this first mover of their envy, receives other incitements,—as, Joseph's telling his dreams to his brethren, which were the prognostications of his future greatness. All these seem brought about without any design ; till they work so much on the bad passions of his brethren that they resolve to take away his life ; and this is to be effected by

**every circumstance of cruelty. Reflection, however, brings them back before they had completed their full degree of guilt. Joseph is next sold to the Ishmaelites, who carry him down to Egypt. Here we see no design, but the gratification of their vindictive passions : a train of accidents succeed one another. The Ishmaelites carry him down to Egypt, which is to be the scene of his future greatness and glory. Joseph is sold to one of Pharaoh's household. He is transferred from the house of Potiphar to a prison. Thence he is carried to the presence of Pharaoh, and from thence to the highest station of power and honour in his government. When we look at the different steps, we see nothing but accidents, but when we examine them, we see each so directed, as to call forth the eminent qualities of Joseph, and to carry forward some great and good design. Would any man suppose, that all these sprang from the dust, and that no Superintending Cause directed all ? And likewise in the common transactions of this life, God may equally interfere in their management, to carry forward some wise design. In the late public revolutions of this world, what wonderful and unexpected changes have taken place, which no human wisdom could penetrate, and no contrivance of man could direct. Those things which men planned, failed, but events turned out contrary to human skill and wisdom :**

here also is seen the hand of God. It is impossible to meditate on such things, without acknowledging a Providence infinitely wise and good. And may not this lead us to trust that our own little concerns are taken care of by God ; that our afflictions and troubles are his appointments, as well as our prosperity and enjoyment ; that the Lord ever reigneth. We have another remarkable instance of God's interference, in the case of Moses, when under the protection of his providence from his most early infancy. Pharaoh, the Egyptian tyrant, had issued his decree, to put to death all the male children of the Israelites. The mother of Moses, when she saw that he was a goodly child, had resolved to make some attempt to spare his life. She first concealed him for three months, and when she could no longer hide him, she exposed him on the waters of the Nile, in an ark of bulrushes, appointing his sister to stand at some distance to watch his fate. Whilst on this watch, the daughter of Pharaoh came down to wash herself in the river, and she spying the ark floating on the stream, sent her maid to fetch it. Opening the ark, she was moved with compassion towards the child. The sister at this critical moment, came forward and offered herself to look out for a nurse for the child. *And the maid went and called the child's mother.* Here then we have a concurrence of accidents for the preservation of

Moses : nothing forced,—all natural. When the child was exposed, it was natural for the anxious mother to watch the event. The most extraordinary and interesting part, is, the arrival of her daughter ; but there is nothing improbable in this. There might be many others at the river at the same time, but none durst interfere : and none had power to effect the salvation of the child. These evident interpositions give great ground for trusting that God encompasseth us behind and before, that he is well acquainted with all our ways. The scriptures contain a history of Providence and its interpositions, and furnish us with the greatest source of joy. *The Lord reigneth.* This principle is a powerful encouragement to duty ; for if it be hazardous, God can protect. He defended Abraham, and Joseph, and Moses. We may not see the way to escape. Further, we have no promise of escaping. Afflictions sometimes execute fully their commission. The best of men have fallen under them : indeed they come alike to all ; to the righteous and to the wicked : and his goodness is showered down equally upon all. *He causeth the sun to arise upon the evil and the good, and sendeth rain upon the just and the unjust.* All must die : and with respect to the manner, this is alike. Good men have this consolation, *that God is their portion, and exceeding great reward.*

Having every evidence that the nature of the subject will admit of, that afflictions are the appointment of our Heavenly Father, that they come from him who is the author and giver of every good and perfect gift, and therefore that they are intended to answer good and wise purposes, it will be next proper to enquire into the improvement which we ought to make of them. In the first place, they are not to be regarded as any token of the Divine displeasure. The blessings of life are not the mark of God's love ; for we read of the great prosperity of wicked men, often, and our experience in the world shews that, with respect to the world and the things of the world, all things are distributed promiscuously, that all things come alike to all : wealth flows in as fully on the wicked, as on the righteous ; the rain from heaven descends alike upon the fields of the righteous and the wicked ; and the sun shines as fair on all his labours : in his undertakings, he is equally as prosperous ; his family equally healthy, and his herds and flocks equally numerous and flourishing. But though these be facts, still we are not to infer that happiness is distributed alike to all. Happiness depends not on the abundance of a man's possessions, on his power, his honour, or his health, or the number of his family, or even on the number of his dependants. It depends on circumstances more within the power



of man ; on the manner in which he spends his life, on the habits he acquires and cultivates, on his temper, on the government of his passions, on his principles of religion, on his belief of God's providence, and on the hopes and prospects he has of another and a more perfect state of existence. These possessions are not the same to the righteous and to the wicked. In their pursuits we are to look for their happiness.

One of the improvements, then, which we should make of afflictions, is to direct them to the government of our lives : the best and the most regular of men, will find room and occasion for improvements of this kind, either as a call to correct some irregularity, or to supply some deficiency. We may not have to charge ourselves with dishonesty, with imposition, or with fraud ; but perhaps we may be addicted to peevishness, to a habit of complaining, and often without many or great causes. But afflictions furnish us with what we may think cause of complaint ; they may bring with them loss of health, or some mark of confirmed disease ; or they may bring poverty, by rendering us incapable of providing for ourselves or our family. Comparing then our present state with that in which we were, when we were uttering unnecessary complaints, when we were in full possession of health, and a capacity to labour, nothing can shew more strongly the unreasonableness of our former com-

plaints, and our want of a just sense of the goodness of our Father in Heaven; and therefore, the improvement to which we should direct ourselves, is to labour to cure our peevishness and our murmuring. We see the goodness of God in the most striking point of view, by having it withdrawn from us. We feel the great blessing of health, when that blessing is actually withdrawn or threatened to be withdrawn. How different are our feelings when oppressed with idleness; we know not how to amuse or entertain ourselves: we do not here feel or acknowledge the goodness of God: we feel a great number of wants, which we cannot gratify. But it is a different kind of feeling which arises from real affliction, when cast upon the bed of sickness or of pain, when we lie under the powerful grasp of some disease, which has invaded our constitution, and threatens our lives. We feel now that our former complaints were unreasonable, and highly ungrateful to our Benefactor. Hence we should strive to check all murmuring and repining, and that habitual peevishness which discolours all the beauties, and blasts all the enjoyments of life.

But another improvement of afflictions, is to call us to the recollection of neglected duties. These may be of three classes; duties we owe to our Maker, to our neighbour, and to ourselves. Many in the days of ease and pros-

perity, forget Him on whom they depend ; they think not on Him in whom they live : they are daily tasting of his goodness, and sharing of his protection and care, but in no respect do they shew their gratitude, and the sense of their dependance. One important improvement therefore, of afflictions, is to summon their attention to Him. It is very common, on occasions of this kind, for men to flee to religion for consolation and hope ; they apply for the prayers of the church, and for the prayers of good men ; and such as have been the most inattentive to religion in the days of health, have recourse to these practices, superstitiously thinking that such things will operate upon them as a charm, and open to them the gates of heaven. How absurd and inconsistent ! We must live consistently, if we expect such blessings. Habituate yourselves to the regular attendance on God, in his services : let your piety become rooted by habitual practice : this is the one thing needful, and this gives confidence in prayer. Be attentive to the public ordinances ; first, because necessary for the support of the religious principles and hopes ; secondly, because it is supporting religion by your example ; and lastly, it is the best preparation, along with the religious life, for every change of circumstances. Neglect not these services upon every slight and frivolous pretence ; if they interfere with worldly

concerns, to which should we give the preference? Rational religion is not inconsistent with real worldly interests, but on the contrary promotes them by regulating them, and directing them to what is proper, by checking what is unlawful, by distributing our time properly; and it has this advantage, that it furnishes us with the testimony of a good conscience.—Afflictions remind us of the duties we owe to our neighbour. Uninterrupted worldly prosperity hardens the heart, encourages a kind of worldly independence, and a confidence in our own powers; but when this is broken in upon by afflictions, it calls us to a sense of our weakness and dependance, and it naturally begets in us a fellow feeling for those who are in affliction, a sympathy for their distresses, and a disposition to grant relief. The miseries and sufferings of our fellow creatures, open a wide field for the exercise of the best affections, and our own afflictions are the best preparation for the exercise of them; and the miseries of mankind, contemplated with the eye of affliction, form a bond of union and sympathy in the moral world. When the afflicted view the distresses of some fellow creature, reduced by disease to an incapacity for daily labour, on which his existence and the existence of his family depend, how much are his feelings roused to administer relief, by his own sufferings. He recollects also the enviable self-congratulation

of Job,—*The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me.* How delightful is this self-congratulation at all times, but particularly at those times when we ourselves suffer. And what a want must those feel, when distress comes upon them, who have none of those pleasing congratulations for their comfort. There is nothing that we can conceive that can equal this in the day of adversity. They may try the force of other comforts; they may have wealth, but what consolation can it give to a wounded spirit, who cannot remember any good deed done by it? They may say, we have injured no man; but this is not the fact, if they have withheld from their distressed fellow creatures what was their due. Hence one great improvement that we ought to make of affliction, is to recall us to those duties we may have neglected towards our fellow creatures, particularly towards the poor and distressed, and those who may have none to help them.

Another improvement, is to direct afflictions towards the care and improvement of our own temper and dispositions. Afflictions are a remedy against violent passions, against gusts of anger, and the offences we are led to commit under these, rash actions, wicked words, and also wicked thoughts. We find what distress they create now. These violent passions lead to sins which may produce the most fatal

consequences: in a moment sins are committed, which will embitter the remainder of our lives, and extend their effects even to eternity. How much do they embitter our afflictions upon the bed of languishing! what would we give to blot them out, and to forget them forever?

Another improvement, is to excite us to sympathize with those who are in afflictions. This sympathy may be expressed in various ways. There are some, undoubtedly, in such situations, to whom we can give no relief but by our sympathy and our prayers, who are placed above want, and who are supported by numerous friends. But there are other cases where our sympathy may confer much good. Such as are in poverty, may be greatly benefitted and edified by charitable helps; such as are friendless, may receive much consolation by a kind word, by a friendly act; such as are oppressed by distress of mind, by a broken heart, may be benefitted also by friendly interference, by directing to such consolations temporal or spiritual, as may be the best adapted to their case, and especially by calling their attention to Him, who is the great dispenser both of enjoyments and afflictions.

Another part of this subject, is to direct our thoughts to such arguments as shall the best enable us to support afflictions; and these are various. The first argument to reconcile us to afflictions, is the consideration of Him who im-

poses upon us such trials : it is the Lord. When the destruction of Eli's house was foretold to him by Samuel, he received it with becoming submission :—*It is the Lord : let him do what seemeth to him good.* And in like manner, Job employs the same principle to reconcile him to his troubles and sufferings :—*The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away ; blessed be the name of the Lord.* We may not be able to see the reason ; but it is sufficient for us to be convinced, that it is the appointment of God. It is not the proceeding of an arbitrary master, who thinks himself accountable to none, and whose actions are frequently to gratify some bad passion, to punish severely some trifling act of neglect or disobedience ; like Haman, who, for the sake of gratifying his vindictive passion and hatred towards one man, was determined to cut off a whole people ; or of one who punishes, to gratify some vile humour or caprice. Nero set fire to Rome, to have in the conflagration a representation of the destruction of Troy. But our afflictions come from Him who is infinitely wise and good, and who is guided by the most perfect reason in all his appointments, and whose corrections flow from a principle of goodness. If he afflicts our body, perhaps it is meant to correct or cure some vice of the mind. Thus he may cure us of worldly mindedness, of excessive attachment to worldly pleasures and sensual in-

dulgences, which prove hurtful to our moral constitution. If we be proud, this cannot be cured by prosperity; adversity and trials are the proper school: and this change is intended to prepare us for a more perfect state. If he take from us our worldly goods, it is to withdraw our affections from an excessive attachment to this world and all its cares. If he take our friends from us, it is perhaps to remove them to a state of more perfect happiness, and so to call our affections to other objects. The belief, then, that afflictions are God's appointments, is that principle which should reconcile us the best to them, and enable us also to bear them with patience.

A second principle to reconcile us to them, is, that they are not the marks of God's displeasure; on the contrary, *whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth*. And to be exempted from severe afflictions, is no mark of a good character, or that such are the favourites of Heaven. How many wicked men have passed through this world, without any visible mark of the Divine displeasure: many tyrants and oppressors of mankind, have been generally successful in their cruel schemes, and retired from life without meeting with any signal mark of the Divine displeasure. They have met with the disapprobation and curses of men, but Providence has not set upon them any strong mark of its displeasure. From this then, we infer, that there is another and a



more perfect state, where all the irregularities which we see here, shall be rectified, and the ways and works of God shall be justified to man. Now on the other hand, we find that many good and excellent men have been exposed to severe sufferings. Some of the patriarchs were exposed to severe trials: Abraham was compelled more than once to remove from his own country, and to take shelter in strange lands, and often he was exposed to severe sufferings. Moses, from his infancy, was a sufferer and an exile. *He refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter.* He was forced to take shelter among strangers, for the protection of his life. David, before he had fallen into great sins, was severely exercised by affliction, in flying from and concealing himself from the persecutions of Saul. Many of the prophets were the objects of persecution; such was Elijah, Isaiah, Daniel, and the three Hebrew children. Hence persecutions and afflictions are no marks of God's displeasure. If, then, so many persons of more excellence, and who acted a much better and more conspicuous part, were afflicted, this takes from us all cause of complaint. Our duty is to bow in submission to the will of God.

A third argument is, if God sees it proper, he will deliver us from afflictions; or which is nearly the same, he will strengthen us so as to bear them. *If our afflictions are to answer some particular good, God will continue them, and*

give to us that temper of mind, which is the best to support them. The afflictions of good men are the strongest evidences of the excellence of the religious principle, when they are supported with patience, and resignation to God's will. They shew to the world the power of faith, the excellence of patience, and the strength of resignation ; and this is an evidence more powerful in support of religion, than any other argument we can employ. You may hear many declamations on the power of faith, and on the excellence of virtue and patience ; but when you see these called forth to action, in the life of good men, here is no fancy ; it is a direct address to our senses. What must have been the effect that the faith of Abraham, in offering up his son in obedience to God's command, must have had upon those who were witnesses to his wonderful instance of obedience ? And what must have been the conviction of those idolaters, who heard the bold and determined resolutions of the three Hebrew children, resolved to submit to every thing, but not to disobey their God ? And to witness the courage and fortitude of the Apostles, declaring that they would obey God rather than man ; can you conceive any argument more powerful in behalf of the faith, than such instances ? And the inference we ought to draw from such well attested facts, is, first : that if God sees proper to deliver us from affliction, he has power ;

and if consistent with the wise designs of his providence, he will grant relief. If our afflictions arise from sickness, from pains or disease, all these he can remove, either by his own immediate interposition, by speaking instant cure ; or he can do it by the operation of secondary causes. If we could possess our minds with this powerful principle, we should submit with patience to God's will. We may pray for deliverance : our Saviour prayed,—*Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me.* But again : we are sensible that *it is appointed for all men once to die*, and we cannot tell the means to be employed, nor the time ; all these are kindly kept back from us : hence, in such situations, our duty is to look up to Him, in whose hands are the issues of life and death, that he may prepare us, that he may be with us, *that the eternal God may be our refuge ;* and if we are to be removed to a more perfect state, may teach us a humble acquiescence ; and that we may be enabled to implore Him, in whose hands we are, that he will give to us those clear views, that we may be supported, and enlightened.

Another argument is, that the afflictions which we endure, cannot be everlasting ; that they cannot be long. The light afflictions of this body, *which are but for a moment, work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,* And in the extremity, if they be laid upon good

men, they have many softening circumstances to help to keep them moderate. We have the consolations of religion, that they are God's appointment, and under his management and direction; that his presence is constantly with us; and that the present life is to prepare us for a more perfect world,—that there, all afflictions terminate.

Another argument that they are intended for good, is, that it is not a tyrant who punishes us, or a master for his own interest; but that it is our Heavenly Father who corrects us for our good. Foolish parents indulge their children in every thing which they ask; and nothing tends so much to render such children unpleasant, rude, and overbearing: but wise parents give to their children what they know to be proper, withholding from them such food as may be injurious, and such indulgences, as may foster bad passions: and they, at the same time, appoint them such tasks as will carry on their improvement. Such is the conduct of our heavenly Father to his offspring, both in what he gives, and what he withholds; this regulates him in his gifts and deprivations. We may not be able to see the reasons: our duty therefore, is to bow to all his appointments, and to say,—*Not my will, but thine be done.*

There is again, great beauty in supporting afflictions properly. Nothing is more unpleasant, than to hear or see people complaining of all their appointments, ever murmuring and repining, and labouring to entertain others with their troubles and grievances: while, on the other hand, it is an edifying spectacle, to see the afflicted labour to suppress their grievances, to put the best construction upon them, by stating that their situation might have been much worse; that many others have greater cause to complain; that they are persuaded that their present sufferings are for their good; that they suffer by the appointment, and in the presence of their God. I have frequently before stated the reflections of the heathen philosophers, that there was not upon earth, a sight more worthy the attention of God, than a good man labouring under afflictions, and nobly supporting them. Again, we have the example of Christ, in supporting afflictions. This is one of the most interesting parts of his example; and in this he was complete. He teaches us how to support poverty,—*For he had no where to lay his head*: how to support persecution; for this was carried against him to the greatest extreme. He was exposed to the whole weight of the power of the Jewish state; yet bore all with patience and dignity: sufferings from his own family, particularly from the treachery of Judas;

the sufferings of an ignominious death: yet he shews no hatred to Judas, but treats him with kindness; no hatred to his enemies, but prays for them; and feeling the full force of the terrors of death,—*Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.* He has given us then an example,—*The Captain of our salvation was made perfect through sufferings; and through afflictions and tribulations, is the way to glory.*

## SERMON XIX.

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MATTHEW vii. 13.

*Enter ye in at the strait gate : for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat.*

IN the representation of the religious life, there are two errors into which men are apt to fall, of a very opposite tendency. Some describe the duties of religion as easy, or rather, they represent God as so merciful and good, that he will readily accept of any services, and will readily forgive any transgressions of his law, either from the infinite goodness of his nature, or moved by the prayers and intercessions of men. It is almost needless to say, that such opinions will have a very unhappy effect on the morals of men. It will make them careless and indifferent, no ways anxious to please God, and therefore entirely regardless of their moral conduct. An opposite error, is to represent the Supreme Being in the most awful manner, inexorable to the unavoidable errors, defects or transgressions of his rational creatures; punishing without mercy, and demanding of man, a full, perfect, and rigid obedience to the moral

law of God. Principles such as these, check the exertions, and damp the hopes of mankind ; and if they believe firmly their own avowed opinions, it may have the unhappy effect of driving them to despondency or despair. Neither of these is consistent with the representation of our blessed Lord. He gives the most perfect character of the purity and holiness of God's law. He lays before us this law in its utmost extent, as comprehending holiness of thoughts, words, and life ; but at the same time never fails to set before us, the infinite love and mercy of his Father in heaven, his readiness to pardon offences, and to receive penitent sinners. And as he is represented to be the Sovereign Judge of all, so we may expect that every gracious allowance will be made for the unavoidable weakness and infirmities of mankind ; but at the same time, he will best know how to punish wilful and obstinate offenders, hardened and impenitent sinners, and all those that slight his offers and promises, and scoff at his holy law.

The same Divine Teacher, that says in the text,—*Enter ye in at the strait gate*, says in another passage,—*Come unto me all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest*. How are we to reconcile these, but upon this principle,—that his law is holy, and pure, and that the obedience he requires is the most extensive ; but that he is merciful to the weak and to the peni-



tent, and that the practice of his law is followed with every pure and perfect pleasure and satisfaction. Our first duty then, is, to keep our eye upon the perfection of that law, and the extent of the duties that he requires. It is *the strait gate*, for many reasons; some of which I propose now to set before you, and to shew what are the consequences arising from this statement.

In the first place : This is a *strait gate*, because the duties he requires of us, it must be allowed, are difficult; and they become much more so to those who have not been early and habitually brought up to the exercise of them. The bare naming of the duties, will shew their difficulty : he requires of us to *love the Lord our God with all our heart*. Now we know this is a duty of extreme difficulty; it requires that we must have the most perfect conceptions of his existence, his providence, and especially of his infinite goodness and love. This knowledge, and this perfect attainment, we cannot derive from nature and reason alone : we learn to know him from his works; that is, we know that he is powerful, we know also that he is good, we may even say infinitely good, because we see so many marks and proofs of his goodness; but we cannot from nature see the wonderful display of his love, as it is represented in his gospel. His love is seen only in his plan for the redemption of the world : in sending his well-beloved Son into this world

*in the likeness of sinful flesh ; in delivering him up for us all.* It is this view of Him, that calls for our love. Barely to say, we must love God for his being made known to us in his works, is impossible ; we can from this principle fear Him, revere Him, and even adore Him, but this is short of love. But our Saviour lays particular stress on this very duty ; we are to *love God with all our heart, and mind, and soul, and strength.* And we are to remember, that we are enjoined to this duty, not because God can be flattered, or served, or honoured by such homage, but because this duty, the love of God, becomes the best foundation for all the other duties we owe to our Maker. Then we shall fear Him, trust in Him, and resign ourselves to his will ; we shall not murmur, or fret, or vex ourselves, with his different appointments ; and if we love Him, we shall readily obey his commandments, for love is the best foundation of obedience. Now from this statement, (and I am not sensible of having heightened it in any one point, or laid any extravagant stress upon it,) must we not own that it is a difficult duty ; and in a figurative sense, must we not say, that this is a *strait gate*. Compare it with the opposite error, with the denial of God, or his providence, with blaspheming his holy name ; this is not a difficult way ; it is easy, any man may walk in it : it requires no thought, no

attention, no exertion for the performance of it. But then where does it lead? what says the text? to destruction. And so true is it, that *the wages of sin is death*: it certainly leads to the destruction of all hope and comfort, of all principle, and all practice. Compare the situation of this man with the other: is now his yoke easy? it is galling, it is distressing: he is following a course of life, which he now abhors and dreads. Christ's *yoke is easy now, and his burden is light*. It is the end to which these principles conduct, by which we are to judge of the principles themselves.

Again: Another duty is, we are to *love our neighbour as ourselves*. Without stopping to enquire into the strict meaning of this phrase, or to examine whether it be possible to love our neighbour to this extent, I shall state some particulars which this duty includes, and which all will own are clearly and fully taught in the gospel.

We are to assist and befriend our neighbour, if we see him in want. This is plainly taught. We are to be *ready to distribute*, we are to be *willing to communicate*; we are to give *not grudgingly, for God loveth a cheerful giver*. This is carried by the apostles of our Lord to such an extent, that we are to *live not to ourselves*. And you will remember the high encomiums which the apostle Paul bestows on charity. And if we want a further explanation of this part of

duty, look at the example of our Lord : he went constantly about *doing good*. Now this part of duty is not easy to be practised, in the sense in which it is plainly enforced in scripture.

Again : We are also to pardon the offences that our brethren commit against us : great stress is laid upon this in different ways. It is a duty, as it is described by our Lord with his usual plainness and power, that has no limits. Thus, when the disciples enquire, were they to forgive *seven times ? not (says he) until seven times ; but, until seventy times seven.*—No end. Forgive the greatest offences—offences repeated again and again. That is, we are not permitted, upon this principle, ever to take revenge. And to enforce it further, we are to *go and be reconciled to our brother*, that is, our neighbour, before we come and offer our gift. And in that excellent prayer taught us by our Lord, we are to pray for forgiveness of our offences, upon condition that we forgive men their offences. It is carried still farther, for we are told positively, that unless we forgive, *neither will our Heavenly Father forgive us*. Is not this, then, a duty most difficult ? it is tearing up some of the most natural desires of the human heart, and some of those desires that are not only allowed, but also sanctioned by men. What name can we give to it ?—*the strait gate*, and how few seek to find it. *The broad way, the wide gate*, is thronged by the great bulk of

mankind. And if, O God ! thou dost not pardon these workings of our heart, these natural though strong and passionate desires, how few, indeed, can be saved. What an idea does this give of the sublimity and excellence of the christian system !

Another thing that marks the difficulty, is, that we are required to lay aside every sin, and especially *the sin that doth so easily beset us*—our constitutional sins. Many would willingly compound to endeavour to lay aside every other sin, but that favourite and constitutional sin. The covetous, if he should be allowed to follow up his desire of amassing wealth, to its utmost extent, would try to conform to the other parts of the law of God. So the man of ambition, he wishes to grasp at power, at honour, at extent of dominion ; but there is no compounding the matter with the law of God : his law is exceeding broad ; it takes in every thing, and it particularly attacks favourite lusts and passions. This is taught us by our Saviour, in language that is very plain, but figurative :—*If thy right hand offend thee, cut it off ; if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out.* Look at *the broad way*, the way in which the bulk of mankind walk, and you see all following some predominant interest ; some pursuing wealth unceasingly ; some, pleasure ; some, honour. How few comply with the strict command to walk in the strait path of duty.

The next difficulty arises from the perfection of the standard to which we are summoned to conform. *We are to be holy as God is holy, and perfect even as our Father in heaven is perfect.* We are to imitate Christ, to walk as he walked, *and the same mind is to be in us, which was also in Christ.* This is the perfection to which we are to aim, and consequently, whilst here, we never can be said to arrive at that destined point: our labour will never be finished, because we never can arrive at the perfection of our Maker. This shews the high distinction to which Christ's religion proposes to carry man. And this cuts off every kind of excuse from the darkness or the obscurity of the precept; because if the precept should fail, we are to have recourse for the interpretation to the example of our Divine Teacher. And this seems to be one end for Christ's coming into the world, that he might give us a perfect example in every thing. Were any doubt or difficulty to arise about the extent of the word *neighbour*; for instance, when we are called upon *to love our neighbour*; our Saviour has taken care to leave us a correct definition of this, in his beautiful parable of the good Samaritan. According to this interpretation, all mankind are our brethren, whatever be their tribe, kindred, or nation, or religion; and therefore, they have a claim upon us for the performance of this duty. Again; if any

difficulty should arise upon that other important precept, about pardoning offences ; look at Jesus ; he forgave his enemies, in the very article of their most severe cruelties, and when he was upon the cross : therefore, by keeping up to this perfect standard, we see the difficulty of the duty, and a good reason why we are called upon to *enter in at the strait gate*. Often, the world at large, who are not of this religion, or who, though professing, do not entirely conform to its duties, pay no regard to this standard. Their standard is interest, passion, whim, or the gratification of the present desire. This is the way by which the multitude conduct themselves, and therefore they walk in the broad way, without any kind of restraint.

Another sense in which it may be called *the strait gate*, arises from the consideration, that we have to conform not to one single duty, but to every duty. He who neglects one duty, or gives himself up to any one single vice, cannot walk in the ways of religion. Suppose a man to be ever so pious, regular, and strict in all the duties he owes to his Creator, punctual in attending upon the ordinances of God, both public and private, never forsaking the assembling with the saints, praying every evening and morning, even seven times a day ; and add to this, that he can treasure up in his mind the whole word of God, can talk of it, and meditate upon it, yet if that

man be not honest, or if that man neglect his family, if that man be uncharitable, not only in refusing bread to the hungry, and clothing to the naked, but uncharitable in his sentiments, uncharitable in his judgments, harsh, censorious, backbiting ; what then signifies all his religion, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. Again : Suppose another character, just, generous, affectionate, charitable, watching carefully over his passions, over his words, his thoughts, and every part of his life, but at the same time utterly negligent of the duties he owes to his Creator, never praying to him, never adoring him, never offering thanksgiving, never acknowledging his mercies ; here also is a defective character, not fit for the kingdom of heaven. He that offends in one point, is a transgressor of the whole law ; and may we not add, he that neglects one point, neglects the whole law : he is a deficient character. Now as this is a great difficulty, it may be called *the strait gate* ; and as there are so few that can come up to this character, we may say that by that gate few enter. Now on the other hand, men may go to destruction, in an infinite variety of ways. The road to life requires an attendance to every duty ; but the road to destruction may be found without an obedience to every vice : it branches out into a vast variety of broad ways. The atheist is running in this road, though in other parts he



may be respectable ; the hypocrite, he also walks in the path of death : the miser, the dishonest, the adulterer, the blasphemer, the uncharitable, the ambitious, are all running to destruction. What a crowded highway is this ! all ranks and distinctions of men ; and not only actual sinners, but the neglecters of duties.

Another illustration of *the strait gate*, is, that the law of Christ extends to our thoughts ; they are required to be correct and holy.

In the representation here given, I am not sensible that I have carried any one point to extravagance. If we believe in the gospel, these statements are fairly to be deduced from it. Does it not here place man in the most awful situation, standing between the high and strict morality of the gospel law on the one hand, and the weakness and imperfection of his nature on the other : he may truly say,—*Lord, who then can be saved ?* The consideration of this answer, and the answer that should be given to it, leads us to one of the most important doctrines in the gospel of Christ, the mercy of the Supreme Being, as it is published to the world and procured by our blessed Lord. His gospel proceeds upon this principle, that *God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.* His religion is the only one that is adapted to the present situation and imperfect nature of

man. Mercy, pardon, forgiveness of sin, make a part of it, as necessary as the important duties there recommended. Our blessed Lord is often introducing this principle.—*If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.* This is supposing that man is not perfect, that he is daily offending, and stands in need of forgiveness. And this forgiveness is promised and offered unto men; but we are to remember, that our hopes of pardon are made upon conditions proper to support the purity and holiness of the Divine law. Not indiscriminately,—not granted to our best wishes, and prayers; but we are to repent, and to forsake our sins. To propose it indiscriminately, would be to offer a wide door to every sin. It may be said that we are not capable of complying with these conditions, that we cannot perfectly repent and forsake our sins. The precise degree of this required of us, and what degree God will accept, is not revealed, and that with the greatest wisdom; that man might be ever vigilant, ever striving against sin, that he might never be high-minded, but always fear. And this duly considered, will be a sufficient answer to the arrogance and presumption of those who pretend to ascertain precisely their own state, in claiming security for themselves, leaving, in their doctrines, the great bulk of mankind to perish. The pardon of God

is offered to the chief of sinners. *Christ came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.*

Again, another of the important and peculiar doctrines of the gospel, is the promise made of God's grace and assistance, to enable us to discharge our duties. The whole doctrine and plan of the gospel proceeds upon the principle, that men are imperfect creatures, and that no man, whilst here, can attain to the perfection of his nature. I need not stop to bring forward proofs in confirmation of this. Every man that examines himself will be convinced that he is in this situation. Let him consult his heart: he will find thoughts and wishes constantly arising there, that are inconsistent with a perfect character. Examine his words: he will again find idle words,—rash words: and without believing him to be profane, or backbiting, or addicted to slander; yet expressions will arise inconsistent with the reverence and submission to the Divine administration,—murmurs, expressions of impatience, passionate words,—words that reflect upon our neighbour. And with respect to duties and offences, we shall find no man perfect here. Many things the best of men do, which they cannot approve of, many things they neglect, which duty requires; particularly those duties we owe to our neighbour. There is no man that does all the good which he has in his power to effect. And if we advance another step,

we shall find that not one of those who are recorded for virtuous examples, were perfect characters. All the characters in the Old Testament are imperfect, and so also were the disciples and apostles of our Lord. And it is one of the excellencies of this excellent book, that we find there recorded not only the virtues and excellent examples of the disciples, but with equal impartiality, there are marked their offences and defects. In the presence of their divine Lord, they shew the weakness of nature,—Peter denied Christ. And even after the descent of the Holy Ghost, we find them still not perfect. Paul and Barnabas had some dissension. Paul's conduct respecting the high priest, is suspicious. He acknowledges a body of sin and of death. No one perfect but their Lord and Master.

Now the great excellence of the gospel, is, that provision is made for this acknowledged weakness and imperfection of men. *Christ came to seek and to save that which was lost.*—*He came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.* The mercy of God is proclaimed by him to mankind. And the promises of this are so handed out, that whilst the sincerely penitent are encouraged, yet no hope is extended to the obstinate and wilfully disobedient. Over the disobedient, every threatening hangs: they may be delivered over to hardness of heart and to confirmed unbelief; they may be hurried

off suddenly ; they may be denied God's grace and assistance, because they refused his offers. How infinitely gracious and good is the Supreme Being. We see his goodness every where, and his love is manifested in the gospel. But the promised grace and assistance, must be sought after. He deals with us as rational creatures. He makes use of means : he works on us by motives. They that have ears to hear, are called upon to exert their faculties. He hath placed no bar in the way of salvation. And we are accountable creatures. And this account will be in proportion to our talents and opportunities. The gate is strait : the duties required, great ; but the encouragement is great ; the assistance, great ; the reward, great ; great even in the present state.

The first remark that I have to make, is, that however difficult this precept—*Enter ye in at the strait gate*, may be, it is most assuredly the command of Christ. It is not that figurative language, which will admit of any other meaning, to render the moral less strict, and the duty less difficult. It can be understood in no other sense.

Secondly : It is a duty that, however much our nature may revolt at its difficulty, we must certainly approve. It explains the great end for which Christ came into this world, to purchase to himself *a peculiar people, zealous of*

*good works.* And however difficult, we must approve, and wish to be able to come up to its full extent. Would we not wish to *love the Lord our God with all our heart*, and to be able also to love our neighbour ; to pardon offences ; and to subdue all our lusts and passions. Pay due attention then, for this is the day of grace, and the day of salvation.

THE END.

Whitby :

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